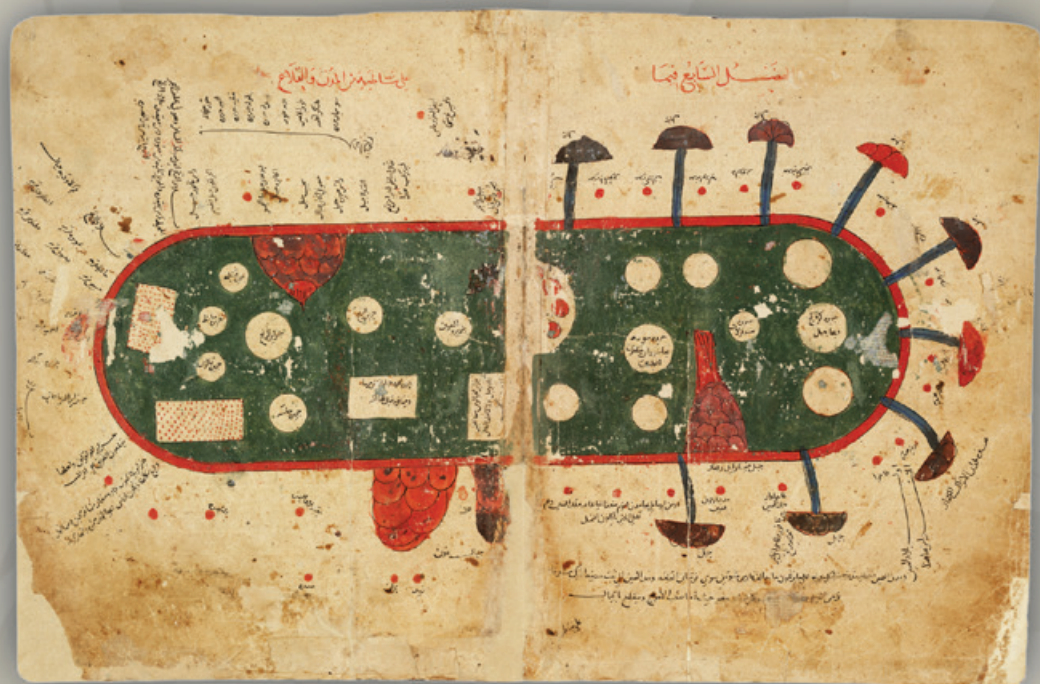


A COMPANION TO THE GLOBAL EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Edited by

ERIK HERMANS



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**A COMPANION TO
THE GLOBAL EARLY
MIDDLE AGES**

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Edited by
ERIK HERMANS

ARCHUMANITIES PRESS

For my Sezgi

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN: 9781942401759

e-ISBN: 9781942401766

www.arc-humanities.org

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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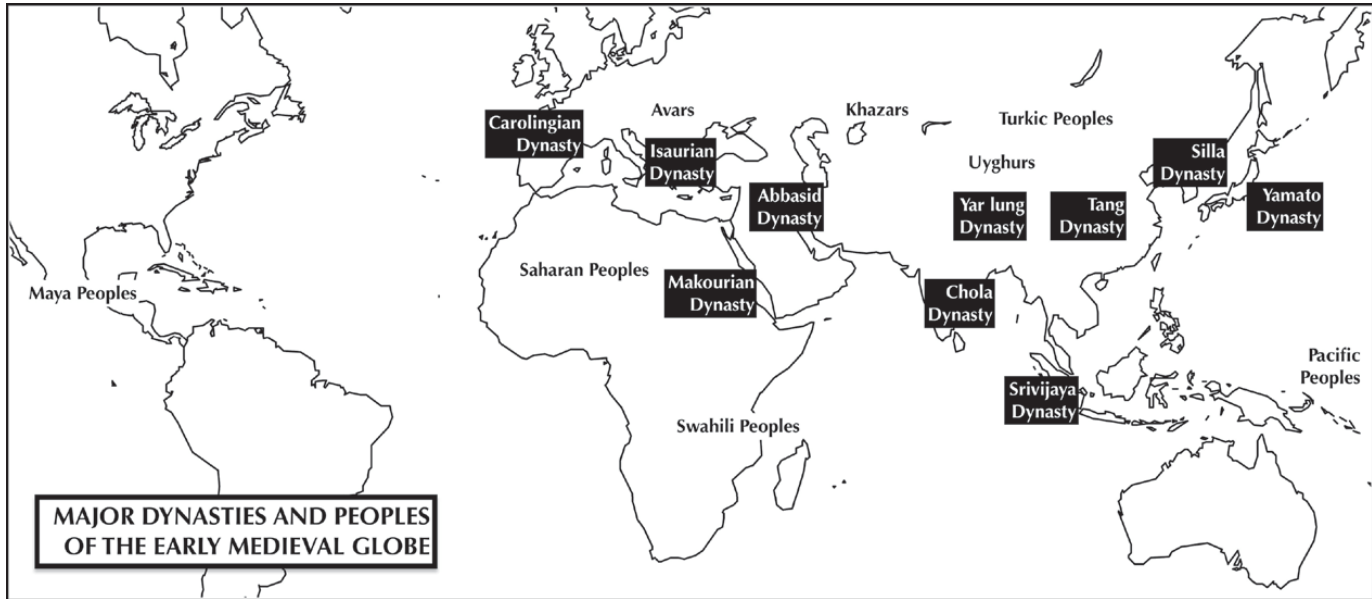
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This companion is the realization of an idea that I had in the spring of 2015: to produce a book that makes readers appreciate the early medieval period of human history from a global perspective. The road from that idea to the publication of this work would not have been completed without the help of several supportive and helpful individuals and institutions. The Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW) of New York University was kind enough to host and fund the symposium in April 2016—*The Global Eighth Century: A Comparative Assessment of Socio-economic and Political Developments in the Eighth Century CE across Eurasia*—where the first group of contributors to this companion was formed. I would in particular like to thank ISAW's assistant director for academic affairs, Marc LeBlanc, for all his help with organizing that symposium. Next, I am very grateful to the staff of Arc Humanities Press for their help during all the stages of the publication process. The trust that this press put in a junior and independent scholar who singlehandedly undertakes a large collaborative project is something that stands out in the world of academic publishing. Similarly, I am very grateful to all the authors of this companion not only for their hard work and patience but also for their willingness to work with an editor they had never met. However, by far my greatest thanks goes to my wife, Sezgi Hermans. Not only did she assist me with numerous details regarding maps and bibliographies, but she gave me what independent scholars need most: time. Without her dedication and support this companion would never have seen the light of day.

Erik Hermans

West Suffield (USA) and Alkmaar (NL), 2018/2019



Map 1. Major dynasties and peoples of the early medieval globe.
© Sezgi Hermans.

INTRODUCTION

Erik Hermans

LOCAL EXPERIENCES OF human beings have always been influenced by large-scale processes. In pre-modern societies, the ripple effects of distant events were in general not as immediate and clearly palpable as in today's world, but they were no less present. This companion aims to lay bare the extent to which societies across the globe were connected during one phase of the pre-modern era: the Early Middle Ages, which are defined here as approximately the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. This period witnessed important historical developments, such as the establishment of the Srivijaya, a Southeast Asian thalassocracy; the expansion of the Frankish polity under Charlemagne on the far ends of Afro-Eurasia; and the consolidation of the 'Abbāsid and Tang empires in between (see Map 1). Historical developments such as those have not yet been integrated into a global perspective. In some cases, the historical record has left clear evidence of long-distance connectivity, such as Persian artefacts stored in an imperial storehouse in Japan during the eighth century or coins from the 'Abbāsid caliphate found in northern Europe and East Africa. However, structural connectivity across different regions is often not immediately visible and has to be deduced from a deep understanding of multiple societies. The purpose of this companion is therefore first and foremost to expand the knowledge of anyone interested in the history of the period in question. While most professional historians have expertise in the history of one or a few regions of the globe, the following nineteen chapters provide a panorama of the early medieval world from the Pacific Islands via the major regions of Afro-Eurasia to Mesoamerica. The individual chapters aim thus to satisfy the curiosity of early medieval historians who want to know more about regions that influence the ones that they specialize in. The panorama of all chapters taken together, moreover, aims to contribute to a more inclusive narrative of early medieval history.

Macrohistorical Narratives

Every narrative of the past is shaped in part by the experiences of its historiographers. The interest in a global context of historical developments, the so-called "global turn" that many historiographical fields have experienced in recent decades, is an example of this phenomenon, since the latest generations of historians grew up in a world where global connectivity permeates their everyday lives more so than ever before.¹ This

¹ For discussions of the global turn in historical studies, see: Manning, *Navigating World History*; Surkis et al., "Historiographic 'Turns.'"

companion is no exception to that rule, and if the editor had lived half a century earlier, he might not have conceived of a global panorama of early medieval history. This work is thus part of the ongoing global turn of medieval studies, which is itself a historically conditioned phenomenon.² However, aside from these accidental circumstances, there is also a deeply held theoretical stance: the premise that macrohistorical narratives matter. This premise does not oppose or contradict the micronarratives that abound in medieval scholarship today. Rather, it aims to complement and integrate them.

For scholars of the Early Middle Ages, the local context of historical individuals is arguably the most important one. The vast majority of people living in this period, including members of the educated elite, were either bound by or gave meaning to their lives inside local or regional contexts. Let us take an example from the best studied region of the globe: western Europe. The ninth-century monk Hrabanus Maurus cared about fellow monks in other monasteries in northwestern Europe and about the civilizational sphere where Latin literature and Christianity played an important role. Contemporaneous events in distant places like Tang China were both unknown and seemingly irrelevant to him. To be able to understand someone like Hrabanus well, modern historians have focused mostly on his immediate context: where he lived and travelled to, the monastery where he wrote, whom he was in touch with, what texts he had read, which of the debates circulating in Latin Christendom interested him, etc.³ However, as historians, we also have the option to take a bird's-eye view and look at the larger processes that may have indirectly affected the life and work of this monk. Such an approach reveals a plethora of processes which are all correlated: our monk lived and worked in a climate of cultural efflorescence; the underpinning of this efflorescence was the monetary wealth and economic activity of the Carolingian realm, which had increased since the middle of the eighth century; that economic intensification partly depended on a demographic upswing, which was itself dependent on the fact that epidemic outbreaks of the bubonic plague subsided in the middle of the eighth century for the first time since the sixth century (see [Chapter 18](#)); Carolingian economic activity was also dependent on trade with the caliphate (see [Chapter 14](#)), the economy of which had started to flourish in the middle of the eighth century as well; finally, one

² Since the global turn reached medieval studies much later than the fields of early modern history or modern History, this scholarly movement may not yet have experienced its apogee. However, while the groundbreaking works of Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, and Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, were relatively isolated studies, in recent years the global turn among medievalists has already led to the following developments: the founding of the new journals *The Medieval Globe*, *Journal of Medieval Worlds*, and *The Encyclopedia of the Global Middle Ages*; "The Global Turn in Medieval Studies" as the theme for the 2019 annual meeting of the Medieval Academy of America; the American research network *The Global Middle Ages* (based at the University of Texas at Austin), and the British research network *Defining the Global Middle Ages* (based at the University of Oxford). The editor of this companion was unfortunately not able to consult the special issue in the journal *Past and Present* (vol. 238, issue supplement 13: *The Global Middle Ages*) that the latter group has published.

³ See, for example, Felten, *Hrabanus Maurus*.

of the factors behind the economic upswing of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate was trade with Tang China (see [Chapter 16](#)). Albeit very indirectly, large-scale processes in a faraway place like Tang China thus influenced the historical conditions in which a Carolingian monk lived and worked. Moreover, a global approach can also put historical evidence in different perspective. For example, a historian who contrasts the production of culture by ninth-century Carolingian monks with the scarcity of sources from previous centuries in western Europe observes an astounding intensification of intellectual output. On the other hand, a historian who compares the Carolingian world with the wealth of sources from the contemporaneous manuscript cultures of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate and Tang China realizes that most of the intellectual output of this period actually did not take place in western Europe. In short, macrohistorical narratives provide a frame of reference in which the relative significance of micronarratives can be ascertained.⁴

Macrohistorical narratives are not merely a product of the current global turn in historical studies. Already Enlightenment historians developed notions that can be seen as antecedents to such narratives. In the twentieth century, scholars like Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee developed philosophical models to which they adapted their own macrohistorical narratives. From the 1960s onwards, a more objective approach of historical narratives that encompass the whole globe was developed, which became known as the discipline of world history. In the past several decades similar fields have emerged under the names of global history, transnational history, connected history, entangled history, comparative history, big history, and others.⁵ The exact methodologies of these new fields have not been fully crystallized. The chapters of this companion do not claim to follow any of these fields in particular. What unites them is an exploration of macrohistorical contexts of regions across the globe. For the purposes of this companion, that exploration will be referred to with the umbrella term “global history,” without implying any specific methodology.⁶

Eurocentrism

Modern historiography oscillates. The global turn that historical disciplines have experienced in recent decades started partly as a response to the local turn in which individual and local sources were considered to be the only knowable subjects in history.⁷ The local turn itself was a response to the metanarratives of history that had prevailed since the nineteenth century. These metanarratives assumed that Europe was the standard of all historical development and historians that followed these narratives viewed all regions

⁴ See also Weinstein, “World Is Your Archive,” esp. 65–67.

⁵ The genesis of the field of world history and its offshoots has been discussed abundantly. For good overviews, see: Manning, *Navigating World History*, 3–120; J. Bentley, “Task of World History”; M. Bentley, “Theories of World History”; Pomeranz and Segal, “World History.”

⁶ For a recent, very thorough, attempt to define the methodology of global history, see Conrad, *What Is Global History?*

⁷ See, for instance, Geertz, *Local Knowledge*; Muir and Ruggiero, *Microhistory*.

of the globe through the prism of analytical standards that were derived from European history.⁸ The appreciation of macrohistorical narratives throughout this companion does not in any way imply that the authors or the editor try to oscillate back to such Eurocentric metanarratives. On the contrary, the ultimate aim of this work is to create a narrative of the early medieval globe that integrates the knowledge of those who have received a traditional training of “European” medieval history and those who specialize in one of the “non-Western areas” of the world.

Nevertheless, in the attempt to transcend a Eurocentric approach lies an inevitable shortcoming. The following nineteen chapters are written by nineteen different scholars who were each educated in an academic world where institutional boundaries have not caught up with intellectual debates. While Eurocentrism has been condemned for at least half a century, academic degrees, departments, conferences, and journals still follow the boundaries as they were set in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While not all those boundaries are hindrances to open historical debates, many of them are. The division of the globe into different “areas,” for example, is often more related to twentieth-century agendas than historical realities. Similarly, the only periodization that is commonly known across disciplines and institutions is the tripartite one of ancient–medieval–modern. Yet for the history of Tibet, for instance, the whole notion of Middle Ages is meaningless.⁹ However, as misleading or outdated as some terminology might be, making newly introduced terms widely accepted is hard, if not impossible. The editor of this companion has chosen not to fight that battle. Instead, “European” categories of time and space are adopted throughout this book, including the title of the companion itself. In some cases, such as the title of [Chapter 9](#), a more neutral designation of a certain regions is used: “West Asia” instead of “the Middle East.” Nevertheless, dividing the Afro-Eurasian land mass into discrete, and conventionally modern, territories runs the risk of reifying modern constructs and may seem to suggest a series of parallel worlds which coexist but are not really connected. However, the semantics of the conventional terms are not strictly followed: after introducing the reader to rudimentary knowledge that has been accumulated within a conventional “area study,” all the chapters take the reader to aspects and themes that do not fit the mould of Eurocentric narratives. If even only one reader feels inspired to devise better geographic and chronological categories for this period of history, then this companion will have been a useful catalyst.

Chronology

Any chronological division of the past is inherently a flawed construct imposed on a continuous course of events. However, looking at the globe from the perspective of human connectivity, the most compelling chronological boundaries of the early medieval

⁸ J. Bentley, “Task of World History,” 4–7 (with further references).

⁹ Foundational discussions about the application of the medieval period to the history of non-European regions of globe can be found in the first issue of the first volume of the *Journal of Medieval History* (1998), which consists of eight articles entirely devoted to this topic. See also J. Bentley, “Hemispheric Integration” and Kulke, *Das europäische Mittelalter*.

period are probably the eruption of the Ilopango volcano in Mesoamerica in 536 CE (see [Chapter 18](#)) and the landing of Norse Vikings in Newfoundland around the year 1000 CE.¹⁰ The former event had long-term climatic ripple effects across Afro-Eurasia and thus had an indirect but fundamental influence on the history of large parts of the early medieval globe. The latter event is the first instance of archaeologically attested human contact between the continents of the eastern and western hemisphere since the Palaeolithic era.¹¹ However, the danger of covering 500 years of global history in one companion is that the scholarly analyses become thin and superficial, especially for regions with much historical evidence. Therefore, this companion focuses on a core period of 300 years, from 600 to 900 CE, with some chapters (such as [Chapters 4 and 18](#)) venturing into the sixth and tenth centuries. The seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries have been chosen as a core period due to a substantive reason and due to a practical reason. This period roughly coincides with two relatively cohesive phases in the political history of the two largest polities of that world at that time: the Chinese empire (Tang dynasty, 618–904 CE; see [Chapter 7](#)) and the caliphate (from the Arab conquests in the seventh century to the political disintegration in the second half of the ninth century; see [Chapter 10](#)). The practical reason is the fact that this companion has grown out of a symposium that discussed the global history of the eighth century.

The fact that the Early Middle Ages are approached as a phase in global history does not imply that all societies around the world were either united or characterized by distinctively early medieval patterns or phenomena.¹² There definitely were regional patterns and large cultural zones that only become clear if one adopts a global perspective, such as the cultural sphere of Sinitic and Confucian traditions stretching from Southeast Asia to Japan (see [Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8](#)), or the simultaneous end of the Justinianic Plague in western Eurasia in the middle of the eighth century and the subsequent demographic upswing and political consolidation in the Frankish, Byzantine, and Caliphal polities (see [Chapter 18](#)). One can also list superlatives of human achievements that date from this period, such as the largest wooden structure ever built (the Tōdaiji in Japan) or the largest Buddhist temple ever constructed (Borobudur in modern Indonesia). However, the wider the spatial reach of one's historical inquiry becomes, the harder any meaningful generalizations become. Like in all other eras after the Neolithic Revolution, some parts of the world contained sedentary and complex societies, while others were inhabited by nomads or hunter-gatherers. The disparity of societal complexity was as large as it could be across the early medieval globe: while the Chinese civilization had already been stratified, institutionalized, and literate for so long that its educated elite could draw on millennium-old intellectual tradition, some islands of the Pacific Ocean were settled by humans for the first time in the tenth century. Europe,

10 Barrett, *Contact, Continuity and Collapse*.

11 The recent volume by Cosmo and Maas (*Eurasian Steppes*) makes an interesting case for the applicability of the period of Late Antiquity, ca. 250 to 750 CE, to large parts of Eurasia (as opposed to just the Mediterranean world of western Eurasia), but not to the whole globe.

12 For discussions on the period 500–1500 as a relatively distinct phase in world history, see J. Bentley, "Hemispheric Integration"; Kedar and Wiesner-Hanks, "Introduction."

India, and Japan were part an interconnected web of trade, migration, and diseases, but these regions did not follow a similar pattern during the early medieval centuries. Demographic patterns in Japan, for example, are in many ways opposite to those in Europe in this period.¹³ Similarly, while much of political history can be summarized as an oscillation between imperial conquest and integration on the one hand and fragmentation and disintegration on the other, all pre-modern centuries are characterized by the fact that there was not one polity or civilization that conquered or influenced the whole globe. As a result, during the seventh century, West Asia experienced a period of imperial integration and expansion under the new caliphate, while Europe and India experienced a period of fragmentation. In other words, these examples show that the notion of global Early Middle Ages does not fit the mould of a particular phase in the grand sweep of human history since there is not one specifically early medieval cultural, political, or socio-economic pattern that applies to all regions of the globe. Nevertheless, such disparity and pluriformity did not prevent human communities from being connected over long distances. The one phenomenon that thus did take nearly global proportions was connectivity.

Connectivity

Connectivity is a fluid concept, and the level of integration of different human communities can vary greatly. In discussions of the globalization of today's world, the notions of connectivity and integration are widely used.¹⁴ In those contexts, two factors are often seen as important indicators of connectivity that are actually irrelevant for the Early Middle Ages, as they are for the whole pre-modern era. The first factor is global awareness. Although some early medieval merchants, travellers and members of the intelligentsia had some knowledge about neighbouring societies, hardly anyone had more than legendary knowledge of far-flung regions, and nobody had knowledge of the geography and civilizations of the entire globe (see [Chapter 19](#)). This was a result of the second irrelevant factor: the distant places visited by individual humans. In the modern world, the more people travel between, say, China and western Europe, the more these places are seen to be connected. In the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, few people travelled such long distances. Instead, most long-distance exchange happened through local or regional trade circuits, which linked up with adjacent circuits (see [Chapter 16](#)). If many regional trade circuits are connected to each other, then an exchange network emerges in which objects travel much farther than people.

There needs to be more than a sporadic attestation of objects from a distant region to be able to speak of connectivity. For example, a single find of cloves originating in the Maluku Island of eastern Indonesia found in a house in Mesopotamia from 1700 BCE does not constitute enough evidence to assert that these two places were truly integrated

¹³ Farris, *Population, Disease, and Land*, 50–73.

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of the notions of connectivity and integration, see Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 90–114.

with each other or that there was pan-Eurasian connectivity in that period.¹⁵ From the early medieval period, however, there is abundant evidence for such long-distance connectivity (see [Chapter 16](#)). The countless regional trade circuits all taken together created a network of exchange of truly global proportions, ultimately connecting the large empires in the centre of Afro-Eurasia with western European monasteries, oases on the southern edge of the Sahara, harbours on the Swahili coast of East Africa, nomadic communities in the Central Asia steppes, local kingdoms on the Indian subcontinent, polities on the Malay and the Korean peninsulas, and merchants from the Indonesian and Japanese archipelagos. While the origins of this vast network of exchange were commercial, it also facilitated the exchange of soldiers, of diplomats, missionaries, intellectuals, and the texts and ideas that they brought, and, finally, of germs. The Justinianic Plague, which emerged in the sixth century and did not truly subside for two centuries afterward, was able to affect people from East Africa to eastern Europe and beyond because the early medieval world was so connected (see [Chapter 18](#)).

Early medieval connectivity also had its limits. While the Afro-Eurasian network of exchange included areas as far apart as the Sahel in West Africa and the Mataram of Central Java, it did not extend beyond them. The most important regions that had already been inhabited by humans for centuries or even millennia, but which were excluded from the global exchange of this period were large parts of Oceania, central and southern Africa, and northern Siberia. That exclusion did not entail a sudden end of trade routes. Connectivity is a gradual process, and a trade network does not end abruptly. Compared to, for example, Baghdad, oasis settlements like Agadem (in modern Niger) were plugged into global trade only to a limited extent, via the trans-Saharan trade routes and the Mediterranean hinterland. The routes that connected West Africa with the wider world of Afro-Eurasia did not go further south than Agadem. At least, there is no archaeological evidence for regular interactions with communities to the south (see [Chapter 13](#)). Absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence, especially when parts of Central Africa, such as the Central African Republic, are largely *terra incognita* for archaeologists. But it is unlikely that future research will unearth not just sporadic finds but enough evidence to be able to speak of connectivity. The same is true for interactions with communities north of the central Eurasian steppes and south and east of the Indonesian archipelago.

The primary explanation for the limits of long-distance connectivity is probably a combination of geography and human demand. Crossing the Siberian tundras, the central African mountainous jungle, or the Timor Sea towards Australia was difficult and dangerous.¹⁶ Merchants and travellers needed a specific reason to regularly make such journeys, like the West African gold that drew them to cross the Sahara. Apparently, such reasons did not exist for central and southern Africa. The lack of (knowledge of) valuable resources and products was probably compounded by a third factor: relative underpopulation of the distant regions in question, which entailed a more limited production of goods and knowledge and thus fewer pull factors that might attract foreign

15 Buccellati and Buccellati, “Terqa”; Manguin, “Protohistoric and Early Historic Exchange.”

16 Summerhayes, “Island Southeast Asia.”

merchants.¹⁷ Finally, technological difficulties for transporting people across difficult terrains and waters must also have been a contributing factor. Such difficulties are particularly clear for maritime connections on the West Africa coast, which are remarkably absent in early medieval and other pre-modern centuries—a stark contrast with the vibrant communities on the East African coast (see [Chapter 1](#)). Only in the fifteenth century, with the Iberian innovations in naval technology, did it become possible to regularly navigate the strong currents on the West African coast and to integrate its hinterland into a global trading network.¹⁸

Not merely the West African coast but the whole Atlantic Ocean forms the largest limitation of global connections in the Early Middle Ages. There is no evidence that any human crossed this ocean in this period, and the Atlantic coasts of Europe, Africa, South America, and North America were not integrated into any global network. The continents of eastern and western hemispheres were thus not connected. However, although the climatic ripple effects of the volcanic eruption of the Ilopango in Mesoamerica did not follow the pathways of human trade networks, they did influence the course of history across Afro-Eurasia to some extent and thus constitute a form of hemispheric integration. Finally, the Americas as a continent, from Alaska in the north to the Magallanes of modern Chile in the south, did not develop the same kind of long-distance connectivity as Afro-Eurasia between the sixth and the tenth centuries.¹⁹ The trade network of the Mayas did span large parts of Mesoamerica, as did less complex societies in North and South America on a smaller scale, but these networks never added up to a pan-American web of early medieval exchange.²⁰

Global History vs Globalization

It is tempting to see all of human history since the last Ice Age as a slow process of macro-social integration in which humans and their communities have become increasingly connected over the course of 10,000 years. If one looks at intervals of millennia, such a process seems to emerge from archaeological and historical records, but when the intervals are narrowed to centuries, this approach turns out to be problematic. The Afro-Eurasian world of the ninth century was definitely less integrated than it would be

17 For an introduction to the pre-modern history of Central Africa, see Denbow, *Archaeology and Ethnography*.

18 Foundational treatments of the navigational difficulties along the West Africa coast can be found in: Mauny, “La Navigation sur les côtes du Sahara”; Devisse, “Les Africains, la mer et les historiens.”

19 Comparisons of continental integration are rare. One widely discussed, but strictly environmentally determinist, theory is Jared Diamond’s continental axis hypothesis, which argues that humans interacted more easily along the east–west axis of Eurasia than along the north–south axis of the Americas because climates change more rapidly along lines of longitude, which made it more difficult for humans to adapt, see: Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, 176–91.

20 For discussions on pre-modern trade networks in the Americas, see Hirth and Pillsbury, *Merchants, Markets, and Exchange*.

in the thirteenth century after the Mongol conquests,²¹ and it also was more integrated than around the year 600 CE. However, it is difficult to argue that Afro-Eurasia was more integrated by the year 600 than by the year 100 CE.²² More importantly, looking at global history as a slow process of integration and connectivity makes it tempting to see every epoch in history as part of the process of globalization. Herein lies the danger of a modernocentric bias by overemphasizing the exceptional instances of imperial integration and long-distance exchange in the pre-modern centuries, when local and regional connections were actually much more pervasive. While this companion can be grouped together with other works on pre-modern global history, it is *not* another history of globalization.²³ The synchronic connections that the following chapters will elucidate do not imply that they are yet another chain in the linear process that ultimately leads to the globalized world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Jürgen Osterhammel has argued, it makes sense to talk about globalization only after all three main oceans of the world were integrated into one trading network, a convenient starting date for which would be the year 1571, when Manila was founded as a Spanish entrepôt.²⁴ During the Early Middle Ages, only the Indian Ocean had already been integrated into a wider trading network for several millennia. The Pacific Ocean was probably crossed for the first time in the ninth century, and the Atlantic was not crossed at all: both oceans were thus effectively excluded from any process of global integration.²⁵ In short, this companion aims to reveal the web of connections across the globe during the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, but it does not support the teleological retrojection of globalization.

Organization of Chapters

The areas of the globe that the following nineteen chapters discuss reflect the historical connectivity of the early medieval world. Regions that are excluded are those that were hardly or not at all plugged into global networks of exchange: central and southern Africa, northern Siberia, Australia, North America, and South America. The first fifteen chapters each discuss a region that was in one way or another connected to such networks. Starting from East Africa, these chapters take the reader around the globe eastward via Southeast Asia to Japan and then westward via Inner Asia to the Sahara and western Europe. Although the oceanic world was not connected on a regular basis with Southeast Asia and thus to the Afro-Eurasian world, [Chapter 4](#) discusses the various archipelagos of Oceania, since it not only provides a panorama of connectivity between communities

21 See Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*.

22 For recent introductions to Afro-Eurasian connections in antiquity, see Kumar, *History of Sino-Indian Relations*; Scott, *Ancient Worlds*.

23 For a recent discussion of pre-modern “globalizations,” see Jennings, “Distinguishing Past Globalizations.”

24 Osterhammel, “Globalizations,” 95.

25 Buschmann, *Oceans*.

that are scattered across far-flung islands but it also includes the first instance of interaction between Eastern Polynesia and South America. Finally, Mesoamerica is the only region from the Americas to which a chapter is devoted since the Mayas created the largest regional network in that continent and since the eruption of the Ilopango in modern Mexico is the only connection of the early medieval Americas with Afro-Eurasia. The final four chapters incorporate material from all previous chapters and provide integrated and thematic investigations that transcend any particular region.

Complex, sedentary societies with social stratification and written traditions receive more attention than non-sedentary societies: only the chapters on Oceania (Chapter 4) and Inner Asia (Chapter 9) discuss nomadic communities in detail. Each chapter discusses the region in question over a period of approximately 300 years, but within that framework the authors have made certain selections. Since this companion has grown out of a symposium on the global eighth century, some scholars have chosen to focus on that century; others have made different selections based on case studies that represent this period best. Similarly, within the regions that each chapter discusses certain selections have been made. As a result, some parts of the world receive little attention, such as northern Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, the southern littoral of the Mediterranean, and the Gangetic plain in northern India. However, despite such lacunae, all the chapters give an extensive overview of the regions in question. Each chapter is written with two aims in mind: to introduce non-specialist readers to the most important developments of the region in question and to provide an overview of the current state of scholarly research. For some regions, like western Europe or China, these overviews provide new approaches to earlier synopses. The chapters on East Africa (Chapter 1) and Oceania (Chapter 4), however, include the first syntheses that have ever been written of the archaeological research on the early medieval period of these regions.

Any overview of global history inherently invites the reader to connect and to compare different phenomena and cultures. While this companion does both, the explicit emphasis is on connectivity. Similarities between the power struggles of the aristocracies in Silla Korea and in the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, for example, can be drawn after reading [Chapters 6 and 10](#), but they are not discussed in the text. Both chapters do discuss the connections that the Silla state and the caliphate had with other cultures and how those connections shaped their own polity and culture. In doing so, all the chapters of this companion aim first to inspire medievalists to look beyond their own intellectual horizons. More importantly, they also aim to demonstrate to anyone interested in pre-modern history that the early medieval phase of nearly every region of the world was part of a web of human connections that had global proportions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewer, Robert Hoyland (New York University), Roald Dijkstra (Radboud University Nijmegen), and Leon Groenewegen for their comments on earlier versions of this introduction.

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PART ONE

REGIONS

Chapter I

EAST AFRICA

Mark Horton

Introduction

This chapter will consider the eastern-facing littoral and its hinterland of the African coast, from the Horn of Africa to the Cape that borders the Indian Ocean as well as the offshore islands, of which the largest is the subcontinent of Madagascar. This is a straight-line distance of over 6,000 kilometres, running both north and south of the equator including the tropical and torpid zones. This huge area has often been neglected in modern discussions of globalization, partly because of poor documentary survival before the first Europeans rounded the Cape in 1488, and Vasco da Gama's voyage along the East African coast on his way to India in 1498.¹ In recent years, the better understanding of the Arabic, Persian, and Chinese sources, as well as indigenous historical chronicles, combined with archaeological field and scientific evidence, including aDNA and chronometric dating, have transformed our understanding of the region, its population history, trading connections, and social processes.

One of the historiographical issues in understanding this region in the Early Middle Ages (600–900 CE) is in the delicate balance of older—often colonial-period—interpretations of Africa's perceived "primitiveness" where any innovation was externally driven through foreign colonization and settlement, and the nationalistic interpretations where all social processes were entirely indigenous and remote from external contact.² More recently, African scholars have embraced a more global perspective in which African society was connected with a globalizing world, from at least the Bronze Age, and certainly in the early medieval period.³ It is this viewpoint that this chapter will adopt, that there were connections which often reached far into the African interior. These connections fed into indigenous social change and even state formation through, for example, the supply of prestige goods and the creation of wealth through the export of high-value commodities such as ivory, minerals (copper, gold and iron),

1 Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*; Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe*; Wallerstein, *Modern World System*; Bayly, "Archaic and Modern"; Vasco da Gama, *Roteira da prima viagem*.

2 Discussed in Horton and Chami, "Swahili Origins." For examples of earlier colonial interpretations, Chittick, *Kilwa*. My own paper, Horton, "The Swahili Corridor," on the Swahili corridor, was often critiqued as invoking external trade as a factor in social change in East Africa and southern Africa; see also Mitchell, *African Connections*, for a continent-wide review of Africa and its external relations.

3 Chami, *Unity of African Ancient History*; Chami and Ntandu, "Eastern African."

slaves, natural products (such as timber, skins, aromatics), and precious stones (such as rock crystal) into the Indian Ocean world.

The Cultural Geography of the Region

The eastern littoral of Africa faces the Indian Ocean, which was the oldest ocean system to develop transoceanic cultural connections from at least 3000 BCE. Once ship technologies had sufficiently developed, coastal and oceanic voyages were possible that linked East Africa, West Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.⁴ The relatively benign sea conditions of the Indian Ocean, with a biannual reversal of monsoon winds and long-distance ocean currents shifting with the seasons, enabled rapid transits increasingly out of sight of land. The seasonal monsoons blow from the south and southwest between July and November, and from the northeast from December to March. The sub-equatorial southeast trade winds blow all year around across the southern oceans from Southeast Asia to the latitude of northern Madagascar and Comoros, reinforced by an equatorial current flowing in the same direction. Coastal currents set northwards during the southwest monsoon and southwards during the northeast monsoon, except for a perennial southern, partly gyrotory current in the Mozambique channel. Taken together with developed ship technology, daily runs of 80–120 miles a day could be recorded so voyages of 3,000 miles could be realistically achieved in thirty days. Voyages to East Africa from the Gulf of Aden, the Persian/Arabian Gulf, and western and southern India could be easily undertaken within this time frame. Critical, however, to successful navigation and trade was the existence of places where ships could await the change of monsoons in relative safety, as well as networks, radiating outwards from these entrepôts further along the African coast and into the African interior.⁵ Such places on the coast acted not only as markets but also places of exchange of culture and religion, as well as centres of craft and manufacturing, shipbuilding, and repair. The favoured locations were often island archipelagos, safe from raids from the interior—the Lamu archipelago, Pemba, Zanzibar and Mafia, the Kilwa archipelago, and the Comoros (see [Map 2](#)).

Reaching the interior of the continent was far more difficult than sailing along it. In the Horn, much was desert, punctuated by a few rivers (the Shebelle being the most important), inhabited by nomadic groups, relying on cattle, sheep, goats, and probably camel pastoralism. These eastern Cushitic (proto-Somali) speakers tended to have a fearsome reputation but may also have operated some trade routes across the Horn and Ogaden into the Ethiopian highlands.⁶ Vessels avoided as much of the Somali coast as possible: there were few harbours and little shelter. The island of Socotra provided a safer stopping-off point both for the route to and from India as well as East Africa. The remarkable inscriptions preserved in Cave Hoq, left by visiting merchants to Socotra,

4 Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures*.

5 Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili*, 89–98. Horton, “Early Islam,” for an overview of links between Oman and East Africa.

6 Cassanelli, *Shaping of Somali Society*.



Map 2. Important sites in East Africa, 600–900 CE.

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mostly from India, span the first century BCE to the sixth century, perhaps suggesting that the island's importance declined in the Early Middle Ages/early Islamic period.⁷

The Lamu archipelago (now in modern Kenya) acted as the gateway to the Swahili coast, as it became known. Key early sites dating to the eighth century (and probably earlier) have been excavated at Manda and Shanga.⁸ The archipelago is located within a magnificent natural harbour while the channels between the islands are filled with mangrove forest, an important natural resource of timber exported to the Gulf until the 1980s. Behind the islands are two flooded valleys, extending some 25 kilometres inland, which provided a route into the more arid interior. This section of hinterland is often referred to as the *nyika*, a scrub bushland and coastal forest which was difficult to cross and formed a natural barrier into the interior. This dry coastal forest still supports small populations of hunter-gatherers—the Boni and the Dahalo—who were much involved in ivory hunting for the Lamu islanders in historic times and most likely earlier.⁹

From the Lamu archipelago southwards to Mozambique, a distance of around 2,000 kilometres, the coastal strip as well as the offshore islands are inhabited by the Islamic Swahili—Bantu-speaking fishermen and farmers—who have lived here at least since the eighth century.¹⁰ While today the Swahili have reverted to a largely fishing and agricultural economy, in the past they played a key role in the maritime commerce of the western Indian Ocean, and the port cities that they built survive as either ruins or living communities in places like Lamu and Pate. South of Lamu, while the Swahili live in coastal towns and villages such as Malindi, Mamburi, Kilifi, Mtwapa, and Mombasa, other Bantu-speaking groups live in the coastal forest and river valleys. They collectively speak the same northeastern coastal Bantu languages as the Swahili, but before the nineteenth century they were not Muslim.¹¹ It has been suggested that the Swahili-speakers split from these coastal agriculturalists in the eighth or ninth century, but before this were part of one population. Bantu-speaking, iron-using farmers (known as Early Iron Age), on present evidence, reached the coast from the interior during the first or second century CE. The upland areas—an extension of the highlands—in what is now the border between Tanzania and Kenya, forming the Kwale, Pare, and Usambara hills, proved to be a much more suitable area for farming than the *nyika* coastal forest, with more reliable rains, and fertile soils, and considerable populations developed there, based around the cultivation of sorghum and millets, small stock, and possibly bananas and plantains. Pastoralist groups—southern Cushitic and Nilotic speakers—were largely confined to the Rift Valley, with little evidence that they reached the coast in any numbers, south of Lamu, until more recent periods.

7 These inscriptions are largely in Indian Brahmi script, but also southern Arabian, Ethiopian, Greek, Palmyrene, and Bactrian; Stauch, *Foreign Sailors*.

8 Chittick, *Manda*; Horton, *Shanga*.

9 Stiles, "Hunting Peoples"; Ylvisaker, "Ivory Trade."

10 Horton and Chami, "Swahili Origins." Wynne-Jones and LaViolette, *The Swahili World*, provides the most up-to-date survey of the Swahili, their origins, and settlements.

11 Walsh, "Swahili Language"; Nurse and Spear, *The Swahili*; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*.

Off the Tanzanian coast lie three offshore islands: Pemba, Zanzibar (Unguja), and Mafia. Now inhabited by the Swahili, they contain numerous sites that illustrate their role as safe havens and entrepôts for the Indian Ocean maritime trade. Zanzibar and Pemba had indigenous hunter-gatherer populations, already living there in the seventh century, as well as significant Bantu Swahili settlements dating from around 650 CE.¹² Bantu-speaking fishing communities were present on Mafia from at least the fourth century.¹³ The islands have excellent harbours, especially on their west side, and reliable rainfall. Pemba, known as *Jazīrat al-Khaḍrā* (the Green Island) is particularly fertile and historically supplied food to the coast. The island sites on Zanzibar and Pemba were mirrored by smaller settlements on the African side of the Zanzibar channel, with connections and trade routes into the interior, which were famously exploited during the nineteenth-century slave trade but may be significantly earlier.¹⁴ Mafia lies opposite the Rufiji delta, a vast area of narrow channels and swamp, rich in mangrove forest, and along with the Zambezi, one of the largest and most navigable east-coast rivers. South of the Rufiji, the next focus of Swahili settlement is the Kilwa archipelago, a series of islands separated by wide channels formed from drowned valleys. The port city of Kilwa emerged in the thirteenth century as the largest and most prosperous trading town on the coast, but with an origin by 850 CE as a small fishing village, located on a sand spit, while Sanje ya Kati and Songo Mnara developed on the other islands in the tenth and fourteenth centuries respectively.¹⁵ Early Iron Age sites are also known in the archipelago and adjacent mainland, and there is the probability of connections into the interior, certainly exploited in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but most likely earlier.¹⁶ Kilwa is located towards the limit of reliable northeast monsoon winds and this may explain its importance as the key to the resources of southern Africa.

The Swahili coast beyond Kilwa is much less well known, although sites with Swahili architecture are known as far south as the Kerimba Islands (Mozambique), south of Cape Delgado. This cape, in Arabic geographies, marks the boundary between the *Bilād al-Zanj* (Swahili coast) to the north and *Bilād al-Sufalā'* to the south.¹⁷ Sufala is an often-cited destination of voyages and represents a long stretch of coastline that extended as far as Inhambane. Reaching and returning from Sufala presented considerable challenges due to unreliable monsoons and the currents in the Mozambique channel, which flow strongly southwards along the African coast. The Sufala coast was, however, key to accessing the resources of southern Africa—its goldfields and elephant populations.

12 Most of the evidence comes from cave excavations on Zanzibar and Pemba; Chami et al., "Preliminary Report"; Shipton et al., "Reinvestigation of Kuumbi Cave." For aDNA results from the caves, Skoglund et al., "Prehistoric African Population Structure."

13 Chami, "Early Iron Age"; Crowther et al., "Coastal Subsistence."

14 Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*.

15 Chittick, *Kilwa*; Horton, Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Mosques of Songo Mnara"; Wynne-Jones et al., *The Swahili World*.

16 Chami, *Unity of African Ancient History*; Wynne-Jones, "Urbanisation at Kilwa."

17 Shepherd, "Making of the Swahili"; Trimmingham, "Arab Geographers."

Large rivers such as the Save and the Zambezi provided corridors into the interior, but it is more likely that most routes were overland, avoiding the riverine swamps. One terminus was the site of Chibuene,¹⁸ near to Vilanculos, with eighth-century levels to indicate connections to the Iron Age sites in the Limpopo valley that show a relatively rapid development in the eighth century into larger villages and trading centres, together with clear evidence for Indian Ocean trade goods such as glass beads.¹⁹

Lying off the southern African coast, and at the head of the Mozambique channel, are the Comoros, an archipelago of four fertile volcanic islands. Evidence for eighth- and early ninth-century occupation has been located on all four, and they formed an important role to access the Sufala coast and Madagascar.²⁰ Firm evidence for the settlement of Madagascar, a large subcontinent, also dates from the eighth century and included populations from both continental Africa and Southeast Asia.²¹

The Zanzibar Archipelago

In the first century CE, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* listed the ports and described voyages down the East African coast to a “metropolis” called Rhapta, via the island of Menouthias.²² Rhapta remains unlocated but was on the mainland opposite either Pemba, Zanzibar, or Mafia, while Menouthias was one of these three islands. Already linked into proto-global trade networks, Rhapta exported ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, and nautilus shell—all commodities that could be obtained on the coast and its nearby hinterland. The imports included spears (iron?), grain, wine, and glass stones. There is little archaeological evidence for this trade, however, and it can therefore not have taken place on a large scale.²³ By the fifth century CE, Sasanian interest in East Africa seems to have begun, with some pottery finds at Ras Hafun in modern Somalia,²⁴ a stopping-off point down the coast, but otherwise material from this date is very rare. The appearance of settlements on the coast with a clearly defined trading dimension starts from the late seventh century onwards.

These early sites seem to cluster on either side of the Zanzibar channel and are characterized by a type of local ceramic, Tana (triangular incised ware: TIW) tradition.²⁵ These vessels are generally open jars, with incised triangle designs, and are found not just on the coast but also in the interior—the archaeological representation of north-east coastal Bantu speakers. The origin of Tana pottery is debated, but there are links to the Early Iron Age pottery of the coast, the makers of which may well have been

18 Sinclair, “Chibuene”; Sinclair et al., “Trade and Society.”

19 Hall, *Changing Past*.

20 Wright, “Early Seafarers”; Chami et al., *Zanzibar*; Allibert et al., “Dembeni Mayotte.”

21 Dewar and Wright, “Culture History of Madagascar.”

22 *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 16.

23 Horton et al., “Ships of the Desert.”

24 Smith, “Ceramics from Ras Hafun.”

25 Horton, *Shanga*; Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, “Ceramics and the Early Swahili.”

involved in the *Periplus* trade, thus implying some form of continuity.²⁶ In addition to the local pottery, the coastal Tana sites have small quantities of imports, of which the bulk are unglazed and bitumen-lined torpedo jars, a typical late Sasanian and early Islamic ceramic from Iran. One typical site from this phase is Fukuchani, in northern Zanzibar, with around 3 percent of imports,²⁷ but with evidence for maritime exploitation (fish and shellfish) and much ironworking.

Around 700 CE, we can follow a take-off in both the size and scale of these island sites. This is best characterized by Unguja Ukuu (literally “great” Zanzibar), the original settlement on Zanzibar island and the site that can best claim to have been an African emporium. Set along a flat beach, within a well-protected bay, and covering around 5 hectares in its early phase, Unguja Ukuu is the richest site of this period so far recorded.²⁸ The import proportions are over 10 percent, with torpedo jars, turquoise-glaze jars from the Gulf, unglazed Indian pottery, and a small quantity of Chinese stoneware. West Asian glass beakers are also common, together with quantities of glass beads of South Asian origin. Unguja Ukuu was also a craft centre, with the smithing of iron as well as the manufacture of shell beads. This wealth is not reflected in its architecture, which was of timber and daub, while no attempt was made to construct harbours. Unguja Ukuu continued to expand to its maximum size of around 20 hectares, with a small number of stone buildings built in the ninth century and the primary occupation of the site ending around 1050 CE.

The equivalent site on Pemba island is Tumbe.²⁹ A single late-seventh-century radiocarbon date on millet provides a possible date for its beginning, while the site expanded in the eighth and ninth centuries to an area of around 20 hectares. The ceramic assemblage is similar to Unguja Ukuu but with a significantly lower proportion of imports—3–4 percent of the total. The Gulf ceramics are similar to Unguja Ukuu, but with a higher number of storage jars from the port site of Siraf. Chinese pottery is absent, but this may be a reflection of excavation location and size. One discovery was of well-preserved rectangular daub houses, one of which had an associated assemblage of over 3,000 bead-grinders for the mass production of shell beads. Tumbe also seems to have been abandoned around 1000 CE when the settlement moved across a valley to a new site at Chwaka. Other early sites on Pemba include Kimimba and Bandakuu, with eighth- and ninth-century imports, but both sites are on a smaller scale than Tumbe.³⁰ Two other sites on Pemba—Ras Mkumbuu and Mtambwe Mkuu—present an interesting problem as they emerge as two of the largest sites on the coast in the tenth century, and while their origins may lie in the eighth century, this remains unproven.³¹

26 Horton and Chami, “Swahili Origins.”

27 Priestman, “Quantitative Evidence.”

28 Juma, *Unguja Ukuu*; Crowther et al., “Use of Zanzibar Copal”; Crowther et al., “Coastal Subsistence”; Priestman, “Quantitative Evidence.”

29 Fleisher and LaViolette, “Early Swahili Trade.”

30 Fleisher, *Viewing Stonetown*.

31 Horton, *Zanzibar and Pemba*.

The importance of Zanzibar and the Pemba Islands is reflected in the Arabic geographical literature. Zanzibar—a place name first recorded by the Portuguese—was known as Unguja Island, while Pemba was most probably Qanbalu Island. Both are shown on a map of the Indian Ocean from *The Book of Curiosities*, dating to ca. 1020–1060.³² This manuscript notes “the island of Unjuwa, there are? anchorages around it, it has a town called A-k-h (Ukuu)” as well as Jazīrat Qanbalu. Qanbalu is mentioned in Yakūt’s *Geographical Dictionary* (1224) as being located on *Jazīrat al-Khaḍrā* (Pemba) and was the destination of al-Mas’ūdī, who was there in 916/917 CE. He noted that the sea captains: “sail to the island of Qanbalu, then to Sufala and Waq Waq at the extremity of the Land of the Zanj ... The Sirafis cross this ocean. I too sailed across from the city of Sanjar in Oman in the company of Sirafi shipmasters.”³³ This seems to imply that Qanbalu was an important stopping-off point on the long voyage south as well as an entrepôt in its own right. Al-Mas’ūdī noted that the town (or island) had a community of Muslims, who had taken the island and subjected the Zanj there, “in the same manner as the Muslim conquest of Crete” around the time of the changeover to the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty (around 750 CE). This may suggest freebooting or piratical activity, possibly associated with Ibadi or Kharijite merchants.³⁴ One of the earliest references to Qanbalu and Lanjuya (Unguja) can be found in al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869 CE) where he described where Zanj slaves can be obtained:

They say: You have never seen the genuine Zanj. You have only seen captives who came from the coasts and forests and valleys of Qanbulu, from our menials, our lower orders, and our slaves. The people of Qanbalu have neither beauty nor intelligence. Qanbalu is the name of the place by which your ships anchor. The natives from the Bilad az-Zanj are in both Qanbalu and Lunjuya, just as Arabs are the descendants of Adnan and Qahtan in West Asia. You have yet to see a member of the Lanjuya kind, either from the coast or from the interior.³⁵

Al-Jahiz, writing on the eve of the major Zanj revolt (869–883 CE) in the caliphate, seems to imply that the two islands were important ports for the trans-shipment of Zanj slaves, who would have most likely have been obtained from the adjacent mainland rather than the less populated islands. The archaeology of both Tumbe and Unguja Ukuu, the ports that were most likely involved, shows significant decline in the tenth century, possibly reflecting the collapse of the Zanj slave trade in the aftermath of the revolt. Al-Mas’ūdī did not mention an East African slave trade in his account but instead documented an extensive trade in elephant ivory, which he implied was sourced in southern Africa.³⁶ Another tenth-century source, *The Book of the Wonders of India*, contains a series of tales about seafaring in the Indian Ocean, and Qanbalu features prominently in these stories.³⁷

³² *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-ʿuyūn*: Bodleian Library, MS Arab c.90. fols. 29b30a.

³³ Agius, *Seafaring*, 63.

³⁴ Trimmingham, “Arab Geographers”; Horton, “Ibadis in East Africa.”

³⁵ al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb Fakhr al-sudān ala ʿl-bidān*.

³⁶ Freeman-Grenville, *East African Coast*, 14–16.

³⁷ Ibn Shahriyār, *Kitāb ʿajāyib al-Hind*, 99.

One recounts a slaving expedition from Oman to Qanbalu in 922 CE, but the ships were driven off course towards Sufala, which is described as 42 zams (ca. 900 kilometres) away, a distance that would place Sufala in the region of Mozambique island.

Islamization of East Africa

While al-Masʿūdī observed a Muslim community on the island of Qanbalu in the early tenth century, which he believed had arrived around 750 CE, most of the other geographical and historical sources suggest that East Africa remained non-Islamic until the twelfth century. Al-Idrīsī described, for example, the anointing of standing stones in Barawa (Somalia), the last (most northerly) town of the infidels.³⁸ Even later, in the thirteenth century, Ibn Saʿid stated that Mombasa and Malindi were pagan, even though Yakūt at the same time described Mogadishu, Pemba, Zanzibar, and Tumbatu as Muslim.³⁹ The first clear statement that the Swahili coast was Sunni (following the Shafiʿite school) was by Ibn Battūta who visited in 1331.

This confusing historical record is flatly contradicted by the archaeological record, which shows that Islam was established in the eighth century in the principal Swahili ports. The clearest evidence comes from Shanga, a medium-sized town located on the south side of Pate Island in the Lamu archipelago.⁴⁰ Here, excavations between 1980 and 1986 revealed a detailed sequence of occupation from 750 to 1425. The material culture of the site was typically Swahili, and this excavation first defined the Tana (TIW) tradition of local ceramics and the connection with the formation of Swahili culture. In one key part of the excavation below the mosque (extended but first built ca. 1000 CE), an earlier stone mosque of ca. 925 was uncovered, and this itself was built over a sequence of seven earlier timber mosques. In these seven mosques, there was a total of twelve phases, so if each lasted ten years, the earliest dated to ca. 780. Radiocarbon dates and associated imported pottery suggested a date of ca. 750. The size of the mosques increased over time from around twelve worshippers in 780 to eighty in the large mosque dating to 1000 CE. A rough estimate for the size of the Muslim community would multiply these figures by a factor of ten, so around 120 Muslims at the beginning of the town rising to around 800 by the early eleventh century.⁴¹

While these mosques might have been reserved for visiting Muslims, this seems unlikely. Associated burials, correctly positioned as Muslims, include women and children. Locally minted coins dating to the early ninth century (or possibly earlier) carry Muslim names and Islamic inscriptions. The most likely explanation for this community

38 Freeman-Grenville, *East African Coast*, 19–21.

39 Trimmingham, “Arab Geographers.”

40 Horton, *Shanga*; Horton, “Early Islam on the East African Coast.”

41 Horton, “Islam, Archaeology and Swahili Identity.” The factor 10 was suggested from recorded populations in the Lamu archipelago, where mosque sizes are also known. Mosque worshippers would obviously exclude women and children, but also, it would seem, significant numbers of adult males as well.

is that it represents local converts to Islam in the eighth century—a conversion process brought about through trading connections with West Asia, rather than conquest. On a coast where slave-trading was widespread, conversion to Islam provided a measure of protection from capture and might have been actively sought by the African inhabitants.⁴² Another possibility, hinted in some of the historical sources, is that the coast provided a refuge from the tumultuous early years of Islam, and Muslims came to live in the Swahili communities. This might include Shia Zaidites from the Yemen and Ibadi from the Gulf.⁴³ While the Shanga evidence is conclusive, it would seem unlikely for this to be unique. A timber mosque was found below the two stone mosques at Ras Mkumbuu on Pemba Island, the last phase dating to ca. 1050, so probably extending back into the ninth century. Locally minted coins with Islamic inscriptions from Mtambwe Mkuu on Pemba are late-tenth or early eleventh-century. A large stone structure at Unguja Ukuu may be a stone mosque of the tenth century. Muslim burials also provide a clue to the spread of Islam along the coast, from Unguja Ukuu to the Comoros and even in the extreme south of Mozambique at Chibuene. The discovery of Tana pottery in western Asia at Siraf, Ras al Hadd, al Ain, and Sharma suggests the presence of African communities there as well, who might have been either slaves or merchants, who adopted Islam in the Middle East and later returned to East Africa.⁴⁴

These Muslim communities of most likely converted Africans remained largely independent from any authority in the caliphate and may well have switched between the different sects of early Islam with impunity as their commercial partners shifted. Another mechanism for the spread of Islam to East Africa may have been through the migration (forced or otherwise) of Africans to Middle East and their subsequent return. In the account of the slaving expedition of 922 CE, recalled in *The Book of the Wonders of India*, the local ruler was captured and sold into slavery in West Asia and while there converted to Islam and eventually managed to make his way home. When, perchance, his captors returned many years later to find the same ruler in his town, he was not displeased, as “no other man in the land of the Zanj has obtained a similar favor.”⁴⁵

Madagascar

The early history of Madagascar is one of the key unresolved mysteries of this region.⁴⁶ The subcontinent developed its own historical trajectory through its population structure that partly derives from Southeast Asia. Madagascar is located at the end of the southeast trade winds that blow across the sub-equatorial Indian Ocean, as well as westerly setting currents, enabling very long distance voyages across the southern

⁴² Horton, “Islamic Conversion”; Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili*.

⁴³ Horton, “Ibadis in East Africa.”

⁴⁴ Whitcomb, “Archaeology of Oman”; Rougelle, *Sharma*; Horton, “East Africa.” For al-Ain and Siraf, I am grateful for information from Seth Priestman and Tim Power.

⁴⁵ Ibn Shahriyār, *Kitāb ‘ajāyib al-Hind*, 31.

⁴⁶ Boivin et al., “East Africa and Madagascar.”

oceans that may in part explain this.⁴⁷ It has long been recognized that Malagasy, the spoken language of the island, has its origin in the Austronesian languages of Southeast Asia, specifically the Greater Barito East group of languages of southern Kalimantan (Borneo).⁴⁸ Specific close comparison is with the Maanyan Dayaks, who live along the Barito river, a group with no particular tradition of long-distance navigation, leading to suggestions that they arrived as subordinates to Malay navigators. In a recent study of twenty-three dialects, the proposition has been made that the area of original settlement was in southeast Madagascar, close to the towns of Manakara and Mananjary, in ca. 650 CE.⁴⁹

Recent genetic studies have tested these linguistic conclusions. Curiously, the Maanyan Dayaks show little genetic affinity to the Malagasy who are closer to Malay and other Borneo populations, specifically the Banjar who operated a trading post on the coast of Borneo. The genetic studies also identify Bantu admixture into the Malagasy population ca. 625–725 years ago (ca. 1275–1375), with estimates for the arrival of the Austronesians 1400–1000 BP (ca. 600–1000 CE).⁵⁰ Both genetic and linguistic studies point to the period when the Sumatran kingdom of Srivijaya was at its height (see Chapter 3) and surmise that the settlement of Madagascar was a consequence of a westward maritime expansion. In one study of mitochondrial DNA it has been proposed that the entire settlement around 1,200 years ago was from a cohort of approximately thirty women (and an unknown number of men), possibly the result of shipwreck or an unintended voyage.⁵¹

The archaeological evidence does bring some clarity to this debate. Earlier, Stone Age microlith-based occupation has been suggested at the cave site of Lakaton'I Anja dating to ca. 2000 BCE (from OSL [optical stimulated luminescence] dates), although the site also has a calibrated ¹⁴C date of 256–573 CE. This may well represent African Late Stone Age seafarers reaching northern Madagascar in prehistory.⁵² There is a gap before the earliest recognizable occupation along the coast, likely village sites associated with ceramics, probably iron-using and shellfish exploitation, that date to no earlier than 700 CE. These sites are located along the northeast coast of Madagascar and are grouped into the Ampasimahavelona (AMV) phase, ca. 700–1000 CE.⁵³ The type-site of AMV located near to Vohémar dates from around 750 and contained shellfish, wild taxa, and coarse oxidized ceramics. Another site belonging to this phase is Nosy Mangebe, a small island

47 Much less has been written about the potential route across the southern oceans. In recent years, there have been two attempts to reconstruct the voyage; McGrath, "Notes on the Navigation"; Lübeck and Erno, *Welt der Entdeckerschiffe*; Beale, "Indonesia to Africa." For discussions of the possible route, see Shepherd, "Making of the Swahili," and Horton, *Zanzibar and Pemba*.

48 Dahl, *From Kalimantan to Madagascar*; Allibert, "Austronesian Migration"; Adelaar, "Integrated Theory"; Serva, "Settlement of Madagascar."

49 Serva et al., "Malagasy Dialects"; Kusuma et al., "Contrasting Linguistic."

50 Hurles et al., "Dual Origin."

51 Kusuma et al., "Mitochondrial DNA"; Cox et al., "Small Cohort."

52 Dewar et al., "Stone Tools."

53 Dewar and Wright, "Culture History of Madagascar."

located in Maroantsetra Bay, and possible trade locale on the east coast. Here the earliest Gulf imports have been recorded, including a sherd of white-glaze ware and a sherd of turquoise-glaze ware; associated ^{14}C dates are early ninth-century. Iron slag, chlorite schist, and rock crystal were also found there. In the extreme north, at Irodo, another sherd of turquoise-glaze ware was found.⁵⁴ However, the site was disturbed and is now lost to sea erosion. If the AMV phase sites represent the early Austronesian-derived settlement in Madagascar, it would appear to be on a small village scale, more in the nature of accidental colonization of a largely empty island than systematic state-level settlement.

There is also some evidence that the Swahili trading networks may have reached Madagascar at this date. Finds of Tana (TIW) pottery, typical of the eighth or ninth centuries, have been recorded on the southwest coast, on the mouth of the Menarandra river. The largest assemblage is from Enijo, but no imports or ^{14}C samples were recovered.⁵⁵ The most likely explanation is that this area was visited on the return from the adjacent Mozambique coast, following the gyrotory currents in the Mozambique channel. One reason for visiting this area was to collect the eggshells of the elephant bird, *Aepyornis*. Sites from the late ninth century with eggshell remains have been recorded, although the bird became extinct shortly afterward.

The Comoros

One possible explanation of Austronesian settlement of Madagascar is that by the eighth century the Comoro archipelago was an emporium, linking Southeast Asia, the African coast, and West Asia. The four fertile and well-watered volcanic islands were located between the African coast and Madagascar, at the entrance to the Mozambique channel. They may have been an ideal location to resupply during long transoceanic ocean voyages. The suggestion of Stone Age occupation has not been confirmed, although the islands were obvious “stepping stones” to reach Madagascar.⁵⁶ The earliest stratified material is from the site of Membeni (Grande Comore/Ngazija), associated with torpedo jars and turquoise-glaze wares, and a little later Chinese Changsha stoneware (750–850 CE). The local pottery is known as Dembeni phase, bowls and jars with shell dentate decoration, as well as the use of red-slipped and graphite decorated pottery. These seem distinctive to the Tana pottery of the African coast, although some Tana sherds are also found in the same levels. The language spoken on the Comoros, Comorian, is closely akin to Swahili, suggesting that the islands were settled from the African coast, although a recent study of modern DNA has suggested a significant Southeast Asian component.⁵⁷ An interesting

⁵⁴ Vérin, *Northern Madagascar*.

⁵⁵ Parker-Pearson, *Pastoralists*, 80–83.

⁵⁶ Wright, “Early Seafarers”; Allibert et al., “Dembeni Mayotte”; Chanudet, *Peuplement de l’île de Mohéli*.

⁵⁷ Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*; Msaidie et al., “Genetic Diversity”; Brucato et al., “Comoros.”

tradition from Membeni recalls early settlers known as Wanyika—a northern Swahili term for the people inhabiting the coastal forests.

Another key port is that of Old Sima (Anjouan/Nzwani), a multi-period site with late-eighth- and early ninth-century occupation. Recent excavations by clearing a road cutting produced ¹⁴C dates from the late eighth century, Dembeni phase ceramics, as well as West Asian imports, including white-glaze wares (dating from around 800 CE) and rock crystal fragments. Flotation of carbonized seeds identified Asian crops including rice, mung bean, and cotton, providing for the first time a Southeast Asian signature in the archaeological record. Dembeni phase sites are also found on Mayotte (Maore), including the type site of Dembeni, and on Mohéli (Mwali) at M'ro Dewa, where a few sherds of Chinese Yue ware have been found. All these sites cover around 5 hectares during this period, and small quantities of West Asian and Chinese imports have been found. While not on the scale of the African coastal sites, nonetheless they represent evidence for contact across the Indian Ocean at this period. Curiously, the first historical reference to the archipelago is in the twelfth-century geographical treatise of al-Idrīsī, who describes the four islands (including the still-active volcano Karthala), the different types of bananas grown there, and the nature of the inhabitants.⁵⁸

Southern Africa

The Comoros may have been an intermediate stage in the long voyage to southern Africa. This was an area rich in both ivory and gold, two very valuable trading goods.⁵⁹ In recent years, there has been a greater understanding of the connection of this region into the Indian Ocean world, largely through the study of glass beads, which turn up on numerous sites in the interior.⁶⁰ One of the ports through which this trade may have been connected, Chibuene, has been the target of extensive archaeological investigation.⁶¹ Chibuene, located in the protected Vilancalos Bay, is a small coastal site, where substantial quantities of Tana pottery have been found, as well as white-glaze and turquoise-glaze wares.⁶² Occupation begins around 600 CE, but most of the ¹⁴C dates cluster between 700 and 1000 CE. Some traces of gold refining were found, including a lump of crucible with gold embedded into its surface.

Chibuene has produced two types of glass bead from these early levels: a very early type known as the Chibuene series and the more frequent, and slightly later, Zhizo series, both made from plant ash glass, of presumed West Asian origin, but made in

58 Freeman-Grenville, *East African Coast*, 19–21.

59 Freeman-Grenville, "Apropos the Gold of Sofala."

60 Wood, *Interconnections*; Wood et al., "Zanzibar and Indian Ocean Trade."

61 Sinclair, "Chibuene"; Sinclair et al., "Trade and Society."

62 An itinerary preserved in the eleventh-century Fatimid *Book of Curiosities* lists ports and stopping places down the African coast as far as "Sūsmār (crocodile) island." This is most likely Bazaruto archipelago, immediately to the east of Vilancalos, where even today the population of crocodiles living in the island lagoons are significant; Horton, "The Swahili Corridor Revisited."

a southern Asian technique. The Chibuene series are otherwise not found on coastal sites and are rare in the southern African interior. By contrast, Zhizo beads, dating from around 700 CE, are commonly found on Iron Age sites in the interior. Apart from Chibuene itself (with 865 beads), 325 Zhizo beads come from Schroda and twenty from the nearby site of K2, a complex of sites that become in the early thirteenth century a state centre on Mapungubwe Hill on the Limpopo. Schroda was a village site and a cattle-based economy, and large areas of midden have been excavated dating to the ninth century, including within it slivers of ivory from the working of tusks. There could well have been an overland route directly from Chibuene to the Limpopo, a distance of around 630 kilometres. While ivory-working was indigenous and connected to the production of ivory bangles for local use, it is likely that some of this ivory was also being traded to the Indian Ocean. Zhizo beads have been positively recorded from seventeen sites in the southern African interior (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana), including thirteen from the Botswana site of Nqoma, a staggering 1,500 kilometres from the Indian Ocean coast.⁶³

Zhizo beads have also been found further south in KwaZulu-Natal, on sites with extensive evidence for ivory-working, especially in the production of armlets.⁶⁴ These sites are thought to be a little earlier than the Limpopo sites, with ivory appearing in the Msuluzi phase onwards (ca. 650–780 CE). Immense quantities of ivory were found at Ndongonwane (1.1 kilograms of waste and twenty-two armbands), KwaGandaGanda (3.6 kilograms of waste and ten fragment of bangles), and Wosi (427 worked ivory fragments, of which forty-eight were armbands). These sites also contained evidence for coastal contact, such as shell beads, while the ivory itself was derived from a variety of habitats, suggesting trade networks. The sites are very much closer to the coast (50–100 kilometres) but 830 kilometres southwest of Chibuene, along a coastline that would be very difficult to sail along. If ivory was traded from this far south, it must have been overland. Zhizo beads are only occasionally found along the East African coast. Despite finds of numerous glass beads from Unguja Ukuu, few are from the Zhizo series. This contrasts to Tumbe, on Pemba Island, where eleven beads were recorded, as well as some from Shanga. There is also some evidence that the beads were being finished off at Chibuene from imported tubes and were specifically chosen for the southern African market.

The rarity of Zhizo beads from Unguja Ukuu and Fukuchani has led to speculation that Gulf traders in this early period sailed directly to the Sufala coast, possibly stopping at Pemba (Qanbalu) on the way south. Al-Mas'ūdī, for example, wrote that Sufala was, “the extreme limit to which the Umanis and Sirafis go on the coasts of the sea of the Zanj ... the sea of the Zanj ends with the land of Sufala and the Waq Waq which produced gold and many wonderful things.”⁶⁵ *The Book of the Wonders of India* includes no fewer

⁶³ Coutu et al., “Earliest Evidence”; Wood, *Interconnections*; Denbow et al., “Glass Beads of Kaitshàa”; Hall, *Changing Past*.

⁶⁴ Coutu et al., “Earliest Evidence.”

⁶⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, III.5.

than six references to Sufala, in one place describing it as the normal place where ships go. In another section, gold mining is described in which adits and shafts are excavated by men “like ants.”⁶⁶ *The Book of Curiosities* gives an itinerary that might have reached as far of Chibuene.⁶⁷ The Persian scholar al-Birūnī described the actual gold trade in the eleventh century, where “at Sufala of the Zanj there is gold of extreme redness.”⁶⁸ He then goes on to describe the trading practices of the seagoing merchants, where the local ruler and his elders gave themselves up as hostages, while “the goods that their people desire” were taken inland to trade for gold. It is tempting to speculate that these were the glass beads that have been traded so widely in southern Africa.⁶⁹

Africa and Indian Ocean Globalizations

The role of the eastern Africa littoral in the proto-globalization of the world has often been overlooked in the face of wider discussions about, for example, the silk route across Eurasia or the maritime connections across Asia, linking the Red Sea, Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The African side of this network has been either ignored by many historians or seen as a rather later development—for example, expansion of a gold trade between Kilwa and Great Zimbabwe in the late thirteenth century. Despite the paucity of historical evidence, which for the eighth century is practically non-existent, there remains much archaeological material to point to the close integration of the region into maritime networks. We can note the location of port settlements from at least 700 CE, with quantities of Islamic, Indian, and Chinese pottery, glass beads, and glass vessels mixed in with domestic material culture. These items can only be explained through regular maritime contact. The spread of Islam in the eighth century to these port settlements can be explained as a consequence of these connections—the local conversion of indigenous elites to provide reliable trading partners and the arrival of religious refugees from West Asia on the monsoon-driven trading vessels.

Even more remarkable is the degree of penetration that these networks achieved. The discovery of a Swahili port settlement on the southern Mozambique coast at Chibuene, which acted as the entrepôt for the export of southern African ivory and possibly gold from the eighth century, can now be clearly linked with the spread of glass beads, the Zhizo series, specifically made for African trade into the interior. The spatial distribution of the Zhizo beads into the far interior—1,500 kilometres from the coast—perhaps provides an indication of the scale of the catchment area from which the ivory was being obtained. Along with ivory, the other key African commodity during the Early Middle Ages was slaves.⁷⁰ While there remains debate about the size of this

66 Ibn Shahriyār, *Kitāb ‘ajāyib al-Hind*, 24.

67 *Kitāb Gharā’ib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-‘uyūn*.

68 Levtzion and Hopkins, *Early Arabic Sources*, 58–59.

69 Horton, “The Swahili Corridor Revisited.”

70 Popovic, *Révolte des esclaves*.

trade,⁷¹ and how many “Zanj” slaves formed part of the armies of the Zanj revolt (868–883 CE) in Iraq, a slave trade was clearly in operation during the eighth until the mid ninth centuries. The key export locations were undoubtedly Unguja Ukuu and Pemba Island, which significantly lie opposite the mainland of Africa where the fertile and well-watered East African highlands reach to the coast, supporting significant populations of Iron Age villages. In the Middle Iron Age (650–1050 CE), these populations decline, and a conclusion is that slave-raiding from the coast and islands caused the depopulation. The Zanj slave trade likely involved mostly male captives so was unsustainable both for the local populations and destination locations. The slaves were largely employed in the waterways of Iraq, draining the swamps and digging out nitrate fertilizers, but it is also likely that they also were involved in establishing date plantations, which involved the lowering of the land and construction of irrigation channels. Dates were a key trade item in the Indian Ocean, and the vessels that most likely carried the date syrup are the turquoise-glaze jars found from East Africa to Japan.⁷²

While the connection between Eastern Africa and the Persian/Arabian Gulf regions has been well known, and provides the obvious monsoon-driven corridor, we should also look to East and Southeast Asia, where both slaves and ivory were in significant demand. References to Zanj slaves, as well to terracotta models of Africans, suggest that they reached the region in small numbers—possibly on Gulf vessels. African ivory may also have been an important commodity in the east-west trade, as al-Mas‘ūdī makes clear, as supplies of Indian ivory could not be relied upon by the Muslim ships sailing directly to China in the eighth and early ninth centuries. These ships brought back Chinese wares, including large quantities of ceramics. The discovery of the Belitung shipwreck (post-826 CE) off the coast of Sumatra, a sewn boat of Gulf construction but largely made from East African timbers, returning home laden with over 40,000 stoneware vessels, provides an indication of both the scale and interconnections in this period.⁷³

New research also points to direct interest in eastern Africa from Southeast Asian Malay traders working as part of the kingdom of Srivijaya. These are increasingly seen as the vehicle for the Austronesian settlement of Madagascar, which may date from the eighth century, on present archaeological, genetic, and linguistic evidence. The destination of these traders was mostly likely the Comoros rather than Madagascar itself, which could be reached directly by latitude sailing from the Sunda or Bali straits, using the southeast trade winds. In one passage from *The Book of Wonders*, in 945, 1,000 small boats, described as Waqwaq (which might describe either Southeast Asians or Madagascans), unsuccessfully besieged Qanbalu. Their reasons were, “Because the land

71 The issue of the export of slaves from East Africa has become contentious. Gwyn Campbell has recently published an essay, invoking genetic, historical, and practical arguments to suggest that the trade from East Africa was modest and the Zanj revolt was largely by non-East African slaves. The documentary sources remain ambiguous, while the evidence from Zanzibar and Pemba for major ports at this period suggests that slaves and ivory were likely important exports in the eighth and ninth centuries; Campbell, “Indian Ocean World Slave Trade.”

72 Priestman, *Quantitative Archaeological Analysis*.

73 Flecker, “Arab of Indian Shipwreck”; Vosmer et al., “Jewel of Muscat”; Krahl et al., *Shipwrecked*.

had trade goods useful in their country and for China, such as ivory, tortoise-shell, panther skins and ambergris and because they wanted to obtain Zanj for they were strong and easily endured slavery.”⁷⁴ While such raids may have been unusual (and worthy of note), at least one tenth-century shipwreck, the *Cirebon* wreck, found north of Java, provides credible evidence that such voyages took place across the southern oceans. This large ship—around 40 metres in length and built according to Southeast Asian lashed-lug construction principles—contained rock crystal from Madagascar as well as Gulf glass and ceramics, glass trade beads, and ivory.⁷⁵

Eastern Africa in the “Age of Emporia”

The Early Middle Ages have been referred to as the “Age of *Emporia*,” as the trading systems of late antiquity gave way to more informal long-distance networks, with *emporia*, or ports of trade, located at the nodes of these networks that connected into the Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, and Islamic worlds.⁷⁶ In northern Europe, these *emporia*, distributed around the North Sea and the Baltic, acted as semi-independent communities with specialist traders and craftsmen, located at marginal maritime locations—such as islands and peninsulas—that could be defended by boundary ditches. The African emporia have very similar characteristics: they are also disconnected from their immediate hinterlands, located on islands and peninsulas, and populated by traders and craftsmen. Moreover, there were also striking similarities in their coinage, such as the issuing of miniscule silver coinage, under mercantile conditions. In East Africa, the coins found at sites such as Shanga in the early ninth century were less than 8 millimetres in size, and in weight and shape very similar to the sceattas of the North Sea.⁷⁷ These tiny coins were testament to the limited sources of silver, which was ultimately sourced from the Islamic world. Excavations have also demonstrated the importance of non-local ceramics and glass that may have travelled over long distances, and the role that precious objects as well as slaves played in these trade networks. While there could have been no direct connection between the two areas, it is nonetheless interesting to observe how both emerged in a similar manner in the Early Middle Ages, as a response to the rise of the Islamic and the Carolingian empires.

Asia and the Underdevelopment of Africa?

Economic historians have argued that one of the long-term consequences of the Atlantic slave trade, and the subsequent European colonization of the continent, was the chronic

⁷⁴ Ibn Shahriyār, *Kitāb ‘ajāyib al-Hind*, 103.

⁷⁵ Liebner, *Siren of Cirebon*; Horton et al., “East Africa as a Source”; Horton, “East Africa, the Global Gulf.”

⁷⁶ Hansen and Wickham, *Long Eighth Century*.

⁷⁷ An important exhibition at the Viking Ship Museum explored some of these similarities for the first time in 2014; see Sindbaek and Trakadas, *Viking Age*.

underdevelopment of sub-Saharan Africa, chronic population collapse, and the removal of valuable raw materials for the enrichment of the West.⁷⁸ Is it possible to argue that during the Early Middle Ages there was a similar removal of the continent's resources, for the enrichment of the Islamic and Asiatic world?⁷⁹ While the figures for the earlier slave trade are disputed, other commodities also formed part of a classic asymmetrical exchange. While the port settlements seem to have prospered, there is little evidence that this wealth, apart from glass beads, passed into the interior. No ceramics, for example, have been found beyond the coastal zone in this period, and Islam was confined to the coast and islands.

Globalization may have left East Africa impoverished, but it also set in motion economic and social changes. Maritime connections led to the spread of plants and animals, which became important staples. The most important was the chicken, which probably arrived in this period through maritime connections and is now ubiquitous throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Zebu cattle were probably also introduced as well as fat-tailed sheep. Plants include rice, bananas, cocoyams, plantains, and taro, all widely grown nowadays. Taken together, these largely Southeast Asian crops and animals introduced an agricultural revolution on a scale similar to that of the introduction of American crops in the sixteenth century.⁸⁰ Another consequence was the development of indigenous states in southern Africa. There was an element of continuity in the Limpopo region, with sites such as Schroda in the eighth and ninth centuries to K2 and the emerging state of Mapungubwe, with its royal burials in the early thirteenth century connected to the control of the Indian Ocean trade. The link between the decline of Mapungubwe and rise of Great Zimbabwe to the north remains debated among archaeologists.⁸¹ Great Zimbabwe's control of the gold trade in the late thirteenth century led to the creation of one of the continent's first urban complexes, with its justly famous stone monuments. The roots of this lay in the Early Middle Ages and the region's connections with the globalizing world.

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78 The classic account of this is found in Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

79 Horton, "Did Asia Underdevelop Africa?"

80 Fuller et al., "Across the Indian Ocean."

81 Garlake, *Great Zimbabwe*; Pikirayi, *Zimbabwe Culture*; Chirikure et al., "Bayesian Chronology"; Chirikure, "Zimbabwe Culture before Mapungubwe."

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Chapter 2

SOUTH ASIA

Kenneth R. Hall

DURING THE SEVENTH and eighth centuries there were significant political, religious, economic, and cultural transitions in north India following the fall of the Gangetic Plain-based Gupta dynasty (320–550 CE), with secondary impact on emerging Central Indian and South Indian successor polities. Diverse Indian regional populations embraced evolving Hindu and Buddhist religions in the post-Gupta era, as Indian religious universality attracted numbers of converts from among existing and expansive Indian residential clusters and their surrounding hinterlands that extended into Southeast Asia.¹ Gupta-era religious tradition provided the foundation for bonding between developing networked post-Gupta temple centres that were patronized by emerging polities and their rural populace.

In the period ca. 600–800 CE, networked partnerships of kings, religious clerics, and merchants provided an alternative to militarism. Most notably, the era was formative to societal development that embraced Indian religions, above all temple-centred Hinduism. By the eighth century new regional capacities for societal inclusion based in temple urbanism marginalized previous rural animistic/naturalistic local traditions. Universal Hindu and Buddhist texts, ritual practices, theological debate, and economic systems centred in temples provided justification for the replacement of long-standing indigenous beliefs which were perceived to have lost their prowess under a failed elite who had previously patronized a variety of secular religions.² This study addresses the key role of eighth-century transitional networking among monarchs, priests, civil administrators, commercial specialists, agriculturalists, and craftsmen.

Post-1950s historiography has moved away from the scholarship of British colonial-era historians, who were most interested in warfare, to the new post-colonial scholarship which has been focal on evolving cultural practices. By the eighth century clerical practitioners of the then “universal” Hindu and Buddhist faiths were agents in the spread of literacy, agricultural technologies, and increased commercialization beyond previous north India epicentres. North Indian Gupta civilization, at its height from the early fourth century to seventh century, had impressed South Asians and foreigners with its advanced agriculture, momentous popular literature and art, and secular diversity.³ Contemporaries continued to see north India as an historical societal hub to be emulated as the Indian Ocean centre of Indic culture and religious scholarship, which recentred in the Nalanda Buddhist temple complex in northwest Bengal from 400

1 Hall, *Networks of Trade*, 36–40.

2 Hall, “Merchants, Rulers,” 182–207.

3 Olson, *Different Paths*, 8–9.

to 1200 CE—and drew students and clerics who came from all over Asia to study Indian religious traditions.⁴

What made Buddhism so revolutionary within the Gupta-era north Indian context was its rejection of the notion of caste and its challenge of the special role of a Brahmin priesthood who held the keys to salvation, as well as the privileged religious and social status of those claiming Aryan lineage, which was a legacy of the previous Mauryan era (322–185 BCE).⁵ Buddhism rejected the fourfold classical Indian division of humanity into those who speak with the gods (*brahmins*), those who rule (*ksatriya*), those who engage in commerce and supervise agriculture (*vaisya*), and others who served the first three (*sudra*). Buddhists accepted into their congregation students, monks, and all strata of society, even though their communal lifestyle broke many caste rules. Buddhists even accepted women as nuns, although reluctantly and always in separate institutions.⁶

By the mid sixth century, the Gupta realm had fragmented into autonomous regional units, and for the next thousand years an assortment of Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslim groups sought to re-establish political unity across the Gangetic Plain. But the Gupta state remained a standard of achievement. The Gupta synthesis was a model for successor states, most immediately the Pala realm centred in Bengal and Bihar from the eighth to the twelfth centuries; its founder, Gopala, was a local chieftain who rose to power in the mid eighth century. The Deccan plateau in central India was ruled by Rastrakuta warrior elites (ca. 755–975 CE), who were patrons of evolving religious architecture that transitioned from cave temples to free-standing temple complexes, and from Buddhism to Hinduism, as was also the case in southern India. The Pallava (north), Chola (middle), and Pandya (south) regional monarchies had competed for power in southeastern India from the third century; the Ceras (fourth century BCE–twelfth century) in south-western India; a series of Buddhist dynasties (with new eighth-century religious links to the international Nalanda Buddhist centre in northwest Bengal) continued to reign in Sri Lanka; and a mix of Buddhist and Hindu Indic religions were foundational to emerging Southeast Asia civilizations, where new “Indianized” states came into existence from the seventh century onwards.⁷

The eighth century was notable as an age of revisionist tantric Buddhism centred in Nalanda, which was widely networked with the Bay of Bengal regional maritime world that had commodity, cultural, and religious exchanges among the Bengal, Andhra, and eastern South Asia coastlines; the modern-day Myanmar riverine system, Malay Peninsula and the Straits of Melaka; and beyond to China.⁸ The previous “classical” Gupta-era northern India culture provided a base for political and religious adaptations

4 Prasad, *Monasteries*; Acri, *Esoteric Buddhism*; Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*.

5 Basham, *Wonder*, 62–72.

6 Bartholameusz, *Women*.

7 Agarwal, *Rise and Fall*; Coedes, *Indianized States*; Smith, “Indianization”; Sen, *Buddhism*. The term *Indianization* was applied by the French archaeologist, George Coedes, who defined *Indianization* as the expansion of an organized culture that was framed upon Indian originations of royalty, notably Hinduism and Buddhism and the Sanskrit language.

8 Acri, *Esoteric Buddhism*; Mukherjee, “Indian Ocean World.”

in the western Deccan and also in southern India, where newly emerging “states” and their wider populations patronized major Hindu temples that in turn displaced previous Buddhist and Jain ritual centres. New and modified regional cultures first came into existence in the broader central Indian zones between north and south, and then, as noted, in southwestern and southeastern India under the early Pallava, Chola, Pandya, and Chera monarchies (see [Map 3](#)). In South India, from the seventh century, Bhakti Hindu “saint singer” networks and temples, in partnership with the new monarchies, inclusively superseded earlier Buddhist, Jain, Vedic, Brahmin, and local religions.⁹ New productive South Indian Brahmin (*brahmadeya*) and non-Brahmin (*ur*) landholding communities sustained formative urban centres, corporate marketplaces (*nagaram*), substantive new temple complexes, and spacious royal residences.¹⁰ Linked international developments took place in neighbouring Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, as demonstrated in recent archaeological and maritime recoveries that pair with contemporary seventh- and eighth-century South Asia texts, inscriptions, oral traditions, and innovative temple architecture.¹¹

The warrior king Harsa (Harsavardhana, ca. 590–ca. 647 CE) ruled northern India from 606 to 647 in an era of transition from India’s “classical” Gupta age (319–605) to an “early medieval” period (ca. sixth–thirteenth centuries) characterized by decentralization. Harsa declared that his authority extended from Gujarat in the southwest to Assam in the northeast, but only reigned as the ruler of Kannauj in modern-day Uttar Pradesh and parts of the Punjab and Rajasthan. He devoted much of his reign to waging war against his neighbours in Valabhi, Magadha, Kashmir, Gujarat, and Sindh; the Chalukya ruler Pulakeshin II (who ruled 610–642), blocked his attempt to conquer the central India Deccan in 620 and in doing so severed the classical-era connection between the Deccan plateau and the northern Gangetic plain. The seventh-century Indian poet Bana (Bānabhaṭṭa) eulogized Harsa in the contemporary *Harsacarita* (*Deeds of Harsa*) text,¹² and the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang (602–664) considered Harsa to be his personal friend and a devoted Mahayana Buddhist—though contemporary and subsequent Indian texts declare he was a Hindu.¹³ In 641 CE, Harsa sent an envoy to the Tang dynasty court to initiate diplomatic relations with China; he also established benevolent institutions (“hospitals”) for the benefit of international and South Asian pilgrims, travellers, the poor, and the sick throughout his realm.¹⁴ According to surviving sources, the major commitment of his time as monarch was centred in the modern-day Bihar, northeast India Nalanda monastery, the then prominent international Buddhist pilgrim and scholarship centre of meditative study, where he was said to have perfected his inclusive knowledge of Sanskrit, Buddhist philosophy, and “classical” Indian thought.¹⁵

9 Zelliott, “Medieval Bhakti.”

10 Subbarayalu, *South India*.

11 Veluthat, “Land Rights”; Kulke, “Imperial Kingdom.”

12 Banabhatta, *Harṣacarita*.

13 Watters et al., *Yuan Chwang*; Wriggins, *Silk Road*; Mukherjee, “Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade.”

14 Sen, *Buddhism across Asia*.

15 Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 19–20, 23, 34, 35, 40, 44, 47n7, 188, 220.



Map 3. South Asia, 600–900 CE.

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In the aftermath of Harsa's reign the Bengal region to the east came under the control of the regional Pala dynasty (c. 750–1174), which prospered from its overland connections to China to the northeast and the maritime Bay of Bengal passageway to the south.

With the decline of the Gupta dynasty in the sixth century the Central India-based Chalukya dynasty took control of the western Deccan Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh regions.¹⁶ As noted, the Chalukyas blocked the southern expansion of Harsa's northern realm and defeated opponents in the eastern Deccan and southern India. The Chalukya "state" was dependent on unifying its collateral regional allies into a fighting force to raid neighbouring territories. Claiming state status, the Chalukya epigraphy glorified Chalukya alliance conquests and the resulting redistributions of the spoils of victory. Chalukya

¹⁶ Dikshit, *Political History*.

inscriptions record rulers' patronization of religious and partnerships with commercial communities—as the Chalukya commercial realm was well connected to the Gujarat coastline.¹⁷ The Chalukya success ended in the late eighth century when neighbours who had previously been subject to the Chalukya attacks—as well as tributaries who were cut off from the flow of plunder from the Chalukya court—all attacked at approximately the same time to gain revenge, as this military alliance ravaged the Chalukya territories.

South of the Chalukya central Deccan core, the Pallava dynasty (ca. 500–758 CE) based in southeast India took military control of the regions to its north and west (north of the Chera realm on the southeast India modern-day Kerala coastline) and subsequently raided the Deccan north to defeat the Chalukyas in 642; the Pallavas occupied the Chalukya political centre at Badami for thirteen years. The Pallava victory therein opened networked linkage and cultural exchanges between the Deccan and South India, as the Chalukya realm's society temporarily redirected their regional focus to the south and away from their previous central India networked relationships with the northern India *doab* Gangetic base of classical Indian civilization (ca. 320 BCE–550 CE). After defeating the Pallavas in 655 CE, the Deccan-based Chalukyas military alliance network remained in power until 753, when the rival Rashtrakuta alliance based in the central Deccan annexed the remnants of the Chalukya domain and consolidated their hold over east coastal Andhra. In doing so the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas blocked the northern landed expansion of the contesting southern kingdoms, although the southeast Pallava, Chola, and Pandya realms engaged in the maritime networking of the Bay of Bengal with linkage to the Pala Bengal-based realm,¹⁸ while the Chera realm on the southwest (Kerala) coastline remained a significant destination of journeys from West Asia and East Africa.¹⁹

In the eighth century, the South Asia continent's wider Asia connections in the central Asian steppes diminished due to regional warfare. Overland travel between north-east Bengal and South China in the east was subsequently supplemented by increased maritime trade in the eastern Indian Ocean,²⁰ while a mix of western Indian Ocean maritime and northwest overland cultural and commodity exchanges with West Asia continued. Increasing India-centred oceanic contacts in Indian ports of trade on India's west coast extended from modern-day Gujarat to southern Kerala,²¹ and on the eastern Indian Ocean shoreline from Bengal in the north to the Tamil (Tamilnadu) regions of southern India and Sri Lanka.²²

17 Chakravartii, "Coastal Trade"; Chakravartii, "Pull towards the Coast"; Chakravartii, "Merchants, Merchandise."

18 Acri, *Esoteric Buddhism*; Hall, "Coinage, Trade."

19 Keay, *History of India*; Hall, "West Coast India Maritime"; Allekar, *The Rashtrakutas*; Kamath, *Karnataka*.

20 Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*; Mukherjee, "World of Srivijaya."

21 Boussac et al., *Ports*; Paniker, *Medieval Indian*; Alpers, *East Africa*; Goitein and Friedman, *Indian Traders*.

22 Mukherjee, "Time, Space and Region."

Central India, 600–800 CE: The Chalukya Realm

The sixth- to eighth-century Chalukya western Deccan-based realm in modern-day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh became the most important successor polity to the Guptas after Harsa was the regional successor to the Gupta dominion to its north. The Chalukyas, based in Badami and Vengi, consolidated control over smaller central India regional kingdoms and raided neighbouring regions to the south. By blocking Harsha's post-Gupta expansion to the south, the Chalukyas were able to develop a functional regional alliance as the post-Harsha regional polities in the north were smaller but retained their independence from the Chalukyas. The Chalukya monarchy's prosperity is documented in the accounts of foreign visitors, most notably the Chinese Buddhist cleric Xuanzang, who visited the Chalukya court at Badami ca. 634 CE, and in regional inscriptions and contemporary literary works written in the southern regional Kannada language that displaced previous classical north Indian Sanskrit. Xuanzang's account characterized the Chalukyas as being a mix of foot soldiers, hundreds of elephants, and a navy that conquered the Goa region on the western India coastline and Puri on the east coast of the Bay of Bengal.²³ The era of Chalukya authority remains noted for its royal patronage of impressive cave and stone-carved temples which went beyond the architecture and iconography of the earlier northern Buddhist and Jain cave temples at Ellora and Ajanta, as represented in the revisionist Chalukya-era patronage of Buddhist and Jain temples at Ellora. Chalukya *vesara* (mule) hybrid architecture blended the styles of northern and southern India as the legacy of the Chalukyas, who thought of themselves as a universal authority that drew together northern and southern India.²⁴

There was continued cave-temple construction throughout the era of Chalukya rule; two were exclusively constructed in the "Dravidian" style of South India, and most of the painting and concluding sculpture of the Ajanta and Ellora caves was completed during the Chalukyan reign.²⁵ The Chalukya realm's numerous, large, and free-standing temples at Aihole, Badami, Pattadakal, and Mahakuta in today's Karnataka state were also a mix of North Indian and South Indian Pallava "Dravidian" temple architecture and religious diversity. Aihole had seventy Vedic, Jain, and Buddhist cave and free-standing temples; and Badami had six cave temples—one Vaisnava temple, three Vedic, one Jain, and one Buddhist. There are six free-standing southern-style *dravida* (southern Dravidian) and four *nagara* northern-style eighth-century temples at nearby Pattadakal.²⁶

The Chalukya monarchy was at its height during the reign of Vijayaditya I (696–733 CE)—honoured as Rajamalla, the "Sovereign of the Mallas" (Pallavas) in retaliation following the South Indian Pallava occupation of the Chalukya region for thirteen years (642–655). During his reign there was prolific building of free-standing innovative Hindu architectural temples moving from earlier Buddhist and Jain cave temples to the

²³ Trautmann, *Elephants*, 183–215.

²⁴ Dikshit, *Political History*.

²⁵ Spink, *Ajanta*.

²⁶ See the site summary in *Evolution of Temple Architecture: Aihole-Badami- Pattadakal*. Retrieved from <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5972> (accessed May 3, 2018).

adjacent western plain. In the following reign, Vikramaditya II (733–744) invaded the Pallava dynasty-held *Tondaimandalam*—then the inclusive regions south of the Deccan plateau three times in a reversal of earlier Pallava-led South India. *Tondaimandalam* was later subdivided into the Chola (*Cholamandalam* [below Pallava territories], later inclusive of the Pallava northern region); the Pandya south (*Pandyamandalam*), the west coast (*Cheramandalam*), and the northwest highlands (*Kongumandalam*) between the Chola and Pallava realms to the east and the Cera realm to the west.

Pallava forces occupied the Chalukya region for thirteen years (642–655). In avenging the seventh-century northern conquests of the Pallava-led South Indian forces, Vikramaditya II was praised in South Indian inscriptions for not destroying legacy Pallava Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples and urban buildings, and subsequently an engraved Kannada inscription remained on a victory pillar at the Kailasanatha temple in the Pallava sacred court city of Kancipuram to affirm Chalukya sovereignty over the south. Subsequent to his victory, Vikramaditya II was honoured in Chalukya court literary accounts for extending Chalukya authority from the Kaveri river in the south to the Narmada river in the north, though actual implementation of Chalukya ongoing sovereignty over the southern regions was unlikely. The Chalukya king, Kirtivarman II (r. 746–753) was overthrown by the western Deccan-based Rashtrakuta king Dantidurga in 753, as the Rashtrakutas consolidated their hold over the inclusive Deccan plateau. In the aftermath, the regions south of the Deccan divided into the five noted territorial domains: the Chera realm on India's narrow southwest coastline (with its western Indian Ocean maritime connections); the agriculturally productive eastern riverine northern Pallava, middle Chola, and southern Pandya regions; and the Kongu upstream “tribal” zone between the Chera west and east coasts, as the agricultural and strategic southeast Pallava, Chola, and Pandya extended eastern Indian Ocean river delta regions prospered.

As detailed, the transitional eighth-century Chalukya–Rashtrakuta era was significant in its fusion of northern and southern cultures based in Hindu (vs. Buddhist, Jain, and Vedic) “knowledge networking,” consistent with what was taking place in southern India at that time. The Chalukya era was also the base for *Vesara* Hindu central and Deccan Indian architecture that blended northern Sanskritic *nagara* and southern *dravida* (Dravidian) architectural styles as initially represented at the Chalukya Badami royal centre. Coincidentally, there was a synthesis of north Indian Sanskrit culture with that of Dravidian Hinduism, most notably in South Indian Pallava *Bhakti* Hindu culture (as discussed below), which diminished dependency on Vedic Brahmin intermediary ritual performances and instead advocated individual one-on-one worship of the divine. Northern Hindu legal tradition of that age was derivative of Sanskrit *Mitakshara* family law of singular (vs. collective) male succession that had its origin in the syncretic western Chalukya courts, with local modifications consequent to widespread South Indian *Bhakti* Hindu “devotionalism” that supported substantive female religious freedom and greater familial equity centred in the partnering husband and wife—as this was not the case in northern India. Notions of gender equity are prominent in the early South Indian Tamil *Sangam* literature which goes beyond the equitable husband and wife relationship in projecting the superseding union of the worshipper and the

divine as this was consistent with subsequent *Bhakti* Hinduism; this will be factored in the remaining study.²⁷

South India, 600–800 CE: The Consolidation of the Pallava Dynasty

While eighth-century South Indian royal conquests were widely portrayed in innovative temple epigraphic eulogies as these paired with fresh temple frescoes, there was an underlying standardized religious symbolism that effectively validated royal sovereignty.²⁸ Claims of significant military victories were imbedded in strategic dynastic eulogies that were most important for their local symbolic content over the strict accuracy of their reporting. It was unlikely that most of the South Indian public would have known about or grasped the detailed significance of eighth-century Pallava military competition against rival Pandya, and Chera South Indian and Deccan-based Chalukya and Rastrakuta monarchies. Pallava regional conquests and territorial annexations had local meaning as they were celebrated in regional temple inscriptions and new court-based Tamil literature. Embellished Pallava victories were initially achieved in a familiar South Indian geographic setting, as the Pallava were eulogized for their defence of the south against the Chalukyas of the northern Deccan in the seventh and eighth centuries, and therein were said to have secured the south's regional peace, stability, and societal prosperity.²⁹

To this day, *Bhakti* "devotional" Hinduism emphasizes an emotional reciprocal personal attachment between the devotee and a divine. This is in sharp contrast to the paths of Brahmanical Hinduism which were rooted in the pursuit of knowledge and the performance of ritual made possible by Brahman clergy and their good works. From the seventh century the South Indian personal Tamil poems were the *Bhakti* base of clerical *Alvars* who worshipped Visnu and *Nayanars* who worshipped Siva as a divine, an absent lover, or a monarch. Visnu, Siva, and *Bhakti* goddesses had distinguishable devotional literary traditions. Visnu to this day has a variety of *avatars* (incarnations); the primary Siva *avatars* are Krisna and Rama, and other human forms. *Bhakti* goddess veneration was regularly expressed in a cycle of festivals and pilgrimages devoted to the unpredictable Durga and Kali, and Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune. Devotees approached the divine with a variety of offerings, reciting the god's or goddess's name, singing hymns, wearing distinctive ritual clothing, and making pilgrimages to the divine's associated sacred places.

In the early eighth century, South Indian religious transition in the Pallava geopolitical core led to revisionist public policy that purposely consolidated regional resources

27 Raman, *Women in India*; Ramanujan et al., *Collected Essays*. The *Mitakshara* family law code, which is based on commentary by the classical Brahmin scholar Vijnaneswara on the Hindu *Yajnavalkya Smriti* text, dictates family male co-ownership in contrast to *Dayabhaga* law wherein sons do not have automatic co-ownership rights by birth but acquire it on the death of their father.

28 Nilakanta Shastri, *Colas*; Karashima, *Ancient to Medieval*; Veluthat, "Land Rights"; Champakalakshmi, "Reappraisal."

29 Nilakanta Sastri, *History of South India*; Karashima, *Concise History*.

and concentrated ritual functions in temples. Temples were institutional bases for societal mobility as local ritual, communal, and economic hubs that variously superseded local landholding collectives, most notably those of Brahmin landholding elite, in favour of broader communal opportunities. Temple-centred communities evolved as institutionally networked agencies of local, regional, and wider agricultural, economic, and societal development. Initially, Pallava, and subsequently Chola, Pandya, and Chera regional monarchs thus broadened the base of South Indian public participation in “urban” Hindu temple-centred worship and patronage by sponsoring Bhakti theological transitions away from previous overly scholastic Brahmanical Vedic Hinduism, and regional “rural” Buddhism and Jainism. Innovative seventh- and eighth-century South Indian Bhakti Hinduism promoted non-Brahmin access and participation in temples at all levels, and temple management, as Bhakti temples became multifunctioning inclusive societal hubs.

This transition was also marked by a change of building materials and architectural styles. There were no new small brick shrines or two-tier brick structures as prior, but strategic South Indian Bhakti temples evolved into sizeable and physically impressive stone structures served by numerous priests, administrators, and other temple staff who made it possible for temples to conduct daily ritual activities, public festivals, and assorted other community events. To do so temples needed secular patrons, whose supply of a variety of commodities (whether given as gifts or delivered in return for payments) are detailed in the era’s inscriptions, as also epigraphic declarations of income derived from temple investments that funded numerous out-of-pocket temple expenses. Thus, from the Pallava era onward, surviving South Indian temple inscriptions, texts, and frescoes also detailed the engagements of local merchants and artisans, whose commercial and financial expertise made them ideal partners to the temples and their staffs, whether as independent contractors, members of temple management committees, or faithful worshippers.³⁰

South India, 700–800: The Rise of the Cholas and Bhakti Devotionalism

Third-century north Indian inscriptions as well as early Tamil *Sangam* South Indian literature record that a Chola king centred in the southeastern Kaveri river delta was one of the crowned heads of the southern Tamil country (the others being the Cera on the southwest Malabar coastline, the Pandyas on the southeast Coromandel plain, and the Pallavas to the north). Politically, until the ninth century, the Chola’s Kaveri river basin remained an ill defined and fragmented frontier region south of the Pallava Kancipuram urban centre. Pallava-era epigraphic genealogies emphasized specific and charismatic royal families that transcended generations, but these declarations regarding Pallava kingship were most often vague in their historical details other than celebrating their

30 Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanism*; Champakalakshmi, “Reappraisal”; Champakalakshmi, *Religions, Tradition, and Ideology*; Hall, “Merchants, Rulers, and Priests.”

generalized royal victories and consequent regional stability. In contrast, in subsequent ninth-century historical inscriptions the successor Chola monarchy's secular actions were detailed proclamations of the successes justifying Chola sovereignty. Often, Chola-era inscriptions transcribed oral "war poems" that were metaphorical eulogies of Chola monarchs' military accomplishments, consistent with Puranic and earlier traditional South Indian *Sangam* era (300 BCE–300 CE) *puram* ("exterior/public") poetic traditions, in contrast to *akam* ("interior") love/spiritual poetry. These "classical-era" Tamil poems declared successive monarchs' love and devotion for their favoured god, as this personal and emotional tie was foundational to the later Bhakti worship tradition as introduced above. In contrast, parallel traditional early South Indian *akam* poems celebrated the successful achievements of a royal warrior leader. Consistent with this *akam* poetry Pallava kings proclaimed themselves heirs to the South Indian literary legacy of dynastic conquest but, equally, celebrated their achievements as devotees of Siva, Visnu, and their linked Hindu divinity. In the post-Pallava eighth-century era, Chola kings went further than the Pallavas in detailing their royal patronage of Saivite and Vaisnava Bhakti Hinduism, with proclamations that the Cholas had the potential for all under their rule to achieve salvation—and in doing so negated previous social differentiations consequent to birth and caste, as also the "heretical beliefs" of traditional folk religions.³¹

Early Chola-era transitional patterns of royal patronage and intervention dictated the eighth-century conversions of most remaining Buddhist and Jain temples into Bhakti temples. Eighth-century Chola inscriptions also detail the implementation of new ritual and civil codes. Previous Pallava urban centres of power at Kancipuram and Tiruvadigai in the Tondainadu sub-region, and Nagapattinam (the most prominent port of trade in that era) were superseded in Chola promotion of the ritual importance of Chidambaram in their Chola-nadu Kaveri river basin core, as also the Palaiyarai long-standing Chola dynastic centre. Chola kings soon extended their sovereignty over the former southern centre of power and Pandya capital at Madurai, and other regional centres outside their Chola-nadu core such as Narttamalai in the strategic Ko-nadu (Pudakkotai) upstream, which is notable for its Pallava-era Jain temples, which were superseded by major Chola Hindu temples.³² Thus, seventh- and eighth-century Pallava, Pandya, Chera, and Chola South Indian kings collectively promoted Bhakti conversions and implementations of new temple rituals which were based in the recitations of Bhakti devotional texts, as Hindu temples and their clerical staff were critical institutional agents in support of centralizing royal initiatives. South Indian Hindu temples became the innovative and interactive centres restructuring societal inclusion and facilitating the advance of those branches of knowledge that were concerned with ritual display, the science of architecture, sculpture, painting, music and dance, and allied arts and crafts—in short, publicly accessible iconography, public space purposely recreated for multiple uses by diverse

31 Spencer, "Sacred Geography"; Champakalakshmi, *Religions, Tradition, and Ideology*; Ramanajan, *Interior Landscape*; Ramanajan, *Speaking of Siva*; Ramanajan, *Hymns for the Drowning*; Shulman, *Songs of the Harsh*.

32 Nilakanta Sastri, *Colas*; Nilakanta Sastri, *Development of Religion*; Dirks, "Political Authority"; Dirks, "Original Caste."

groups, and varied art forms, all of which provided the foundations of efficient ideological systems.

This temple-centred and wider societal approach to seventh- and eighth-century early south Asian history is quite different from that presented by the British colonial-era scholars' focus on the militant and administrative achievements versus the cultural.³³ Their emphasis for varied political, social, and cultural internally focused reasons was on the legacy of Indian military conquests and the emergent role of regional military elite in India's history, as this increased court-centred authority over that of prior rural collectives. Against this dynastic militancy conception of India's past, revisionist post-colonial scholars asserted that from the eighth century South Indian kings depended on secular collective backing by their military, administrative, and especially empowered temple institutional authority. This collective leadership consisted of temple priests, temple administrative staff, and key temple patrons which included landholders, commercial specialists, and artisans, as all of these are prominently identified in Pallava and Chola-era inscriptions, contemporary literary compositions, and temple frescoes.³⁴

Thus, South Indian temple-based Bhakti *devotionalism* from the eighth century developed a "transcendental" norm and, hence, a centrality that provided a bridge or pathway as a means to develop and achieve uniformity among different religions and sects. Evolving South Indian Bhakti religious tradition in the eighth-century Pallava-Chola age embraced societal diversity. Celebrated Bhakti saints and text composers had a mix of personal histories including members of underprivileged socio-economic groups, but only Brahmins could initiate society into Hindu religious ritual and therein purify humankind in preparation for salvation. *Smarta* and *Vadama* Brahmins, who were followers of northern Vedic and *Smṛti* rites that were incorporated into South Indian Bhakti worship, remained the superiors to "inferior" local priests in temple management and ritual affairs. But, as a check against Brahmin authority, early South Indian temple iconography and ritual practices evolved in direct relation to the secular requirements and the populist ideological needs of Pallava-Chola-era monarchs.

By looking at this transition in dedicated temple space it becomes clear that from the eighth century there was a widespread process of South Indian societal acculturation, centred in the royal patronage of temples that in a variety of ways converted local clerics and their cult centres and sacred sites into incorporated shrines dedicated to the worship of Siva and Visnu.³⁵ While championing the Bhakti ideology, post-eighth-century South Indian kings generally favoured Saivism over worship of Visnu. Saiva *Nayanars* ("devotees/priests"), backed by royal patronage, were systemically better managers and benefited from royal preference of rituals focal on Siva *linga* worship, and suppressed previous local religious cults and their shrines, including those of Durga, Kali, and other female divine, and Ganesa.

33 Nilakanta Sastri, *Colas*. In contrast, Burton Stein's focus is on local rather than imperial rule over early segmented South Indian society; see Stein, *Peasant State*. See also Subbarayalu, *South India*.

34 Stein, "State and the Agrarian Order"; Champakalashmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanism*.

35 Champakalashmi, *Religions, Tradition, and Ideology*; Hall, "Early Indian Ocean Trade."

Layered Communities in Chola-Era South India

Historian Burton Stein's "segmentary state" perception of South India from the eighth century viewed the evolving state structure as a hierarchical series of uniform semi-autonomous localities, interconnected by linked religious networks created by widespread donations to temples and Brahmins.³⁶ In his view, Hindu temples were the vital agents of integration: economically by their redistributions of resources, societally by their inclusion of diverse societal groups into common communities of worship, and politically through their bestowal of ritual honour on kings and local elites. Champakalaskmi's subsequent studies have added detail to Stein's earlier synthesis, as she has tracked the coincidence of the expansionist Bhakti religious tradition and temple-building in Chola-era South India, as from the eighth-century Bhakti expansionism benefited from the Chola monarchy's substantial political and financial temple backing.³⁷ Resulting vertically integrated Bhakti institutionalized ritual networks—centred in the Chidambaram (Saivite) and Srirangam (Vaisnava) pilgrimage temples in turn sustained the Chola monarchy's varied vertical political linkages. There were also economic implications, as the spread of Bhakti and Chola networked society was foundational to the Chola realm's economic developments.

South Indian temples assumed integrative functions, bringing together major property holders (individuals and communities) into overlapping political and religious patronage networks that supplied significant pools of wealth, drawn from the multiple sectors of society, this then was redistributed to individuals, pastorals, and agriculturalists. These redistributions were based on the recipient clients' needs as also their importance in the patronage alliances. In sum, the Pallava-Chola networked Bhakti temples structurally integrated non-landowning social groups with landed populations into a vertically and horizontally linked collective society.

Bhakti religious networks that became dominant under Pallava and subsequent Chola patronage, as royal patronage variously favoured the Chidambaram and Srirangam pilgrimage temples that were the ritual centres of the two South Indian Bhakti religious networks, ritually linked to second-tier major and third-tier local vertically and horizontally networked temples. Buddhist, Jain, and local cult temples that had not been converted into Bhakti temples continued to function as autonomous and semi-autonomous religious institutions at the peripheral secondary and local levels. Political networks centred in royal palace urban centres, which were linked to a series of horizontally and vertically allied secondary and third-tier local political centres. Seventh- and eighth-century Pallava and subsequent Chola-era economic networking centred in previously noted primary multidimensional urban market centres such as Kancipuram and the Nagappattinam port of trade on the coast, while Nartamalai and Tiruvannamalai were major intermediary caravan centres that connected the Pallava-Chola downstream heartland with South India's highlands.³⁸ Downstream primary urban centres were

³⁶ Stein, *Peasant State and Society*.

³⁷ Champakalashmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanism*; Champakalashmi, *Religions, Tradition, and Ideology*.

³⁸ Karashima, *South Indian History*; Karashima, *Ancient to Medieval*.

vertically linked to strategic secondary marketplaces, as also to numerous regionally prominent agricultural centres, which were in turn networked to third-tier settlements such as the local hamlets and “tribal” collectives in the Kaveri river basin upstream.

Kancipuram: An Early Medieval Hub of Commerce and Religion

Kancipuram was the seat of power in the Tondaimandalam region, which corresponded roughly to the heart of the eighth-century Pallava domain. Although there are references in the inscriptions of Kancipuram to walled sectors of the city, it remains unclear whether the citadel fortifications from the early first millennium still existed as viable defences during the Pallava period. Undoubtedly, the Pallava monarchs maintained palaces, but (in a pattern typical of early South Asia as a whole) no traces of these have survived, since they likely included numbers of wooden structures. Stone temples with their walled compounds stood amid housing that probably did not rise above two stories and usually were undoubtedly ground-level homes made of perishable materials such as wood and thatch—the standard housing for the majority of the urban population. As clusters of residencies and shops lay interspersed with city gardens, Kancipuram was a more concentrated version of the multi-nucleated urbanism typical of South India as a whole but still remained characteristic of many temple-centred settlements incorporated within a single plan. Although population figures are purely speculative, the projected peak during the Pallava period was about 10,000 Kancipuram residents, and 25,000 in the Chola era.³⁹

The fact that Kancipuram has had such a colourful political and religious history has tended to obscure its economic pursuits, even though the city’s commerce derived much of its vitality from political and religious activities. In the age of the seventh- and eighth-century Pallava kings, the simultaneous growth of the city’s political, religious, and economic functions was synergetic, as each sphere of action derived added vitality from its interaction with the others. Indeed, a picture of merchants and their activities, just as for the rest of this period’s history, must rely heavily upon the records of pious benefactions inscribed on the walls of local Hindu temples and copperplate records, most of which record religious transactions. Among the famous temples of this pilgrimage centre, the Kailasanatha and Vaikunthaperumal temples both date from the seventh- and eighth-century Pallava era. Since over the centuries the city has hosted such a dazzling array of temples and non-Hindu institutions, it is not surprising that much less is known about the merchants and artisans who once walked its streets than about the prominent resident kings and clerics, or about the great deities whose presence sanctified Kancipuram’s famous shrines. Literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence tells a great deal about commerce in eighth-century Kancipuram.⁴⁰

39 Heitzman, *City in South Asia*, 313, estimates Kancipuram’s population in the Pallava era peaked at 10,000 residents and 25,000 in the Chola era; Rao, *Kancipuram*, agrees with Heitzman’s estimate that Kancipuram’s Chola-era population was ca. 25,000.

40 Heitzman, “Temple Urbanism”; Heitzman, “Urbanization.”

Scholars assert that there has been long-term southeast Bay of Bengal coastal sea-borne commerce, attracted by the availability of pearls in the southern Bay of Bengal Gulf of Manar—a large shallow bay with a chain of low islands and reefs known as Adam’s Bridge that lies between the west coast of Sri Lanka and the southeast tip of the Coromandel coast. Other southeast Indian goods, notably cotton textiles, preceded and stimulated the rise of a complex civilization on the southern Coromandel coastline.⁴¹ South Asian and foreign texts as well as archaeological evidence confirm the existence of settlements along the coast and the several riverine tracts of the Coromandel plain in the early centuries of the Christian era.⁴² By the third century, Pallava kings had established their capital at Kancipuram and began to extend their hegemony over that portion of the southeast coastal plain known in ancient times as *Tondaimandalam* (the Sanskritized form of the Tamil *Tondainadu*, geographically corresponding to all or part of the modern-day Nellore, Chittoor, North and South Arcot, Salem, and Madras-Chingleput districts), networks of maritime commerce already connected that region with the outside world. When the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang (ca. 602–664 CE) visited India in the seventh century, Kancipuram and its Mamallapuram seaport to its east were strategically linked to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.⁴³

The evidence for Kancipuram’s strong international connections in early times is convincing, but it is essential to recognize that its economic growth was due not only to the ebb and flow of coastal maritime trade but also to the development of networked inland commerce, in which Kanci likewise assumed a dominant role. Despite the largely subsistence character of the regional rural economy and even though itinerant merchants had to contend with poorly developed facilities for inland transport and the presence of brigands on the roads that the traders’ caravans had to traverse, commercial life in the coastal region came to exhibit a surprising vitality.⁴⁴

By the sixth century, when Kancipuram emerged fully in the recorded history, it had become the capital of a kingdom that embraced many other settlements in the linked riverine and coastal southeast littoral tracts adjacent to the Kancipuram urban centre. Its prosperity reflected both the growth of long-distance trade and the development of subsistence and commercial agriculture in the immediate area. The Pallava capital was also strategically located at the centre of one of the two major cotton-producing regions of South India—the second was in the agricultural region around the Pandya capital at Madurai to its south—as each had the black soil required for the successful cultivation of cotton. Thus, Kancipuram and Madurai were competing not only as royal urban courts but also as textile market centres of high-quality South Indian cotton cloth that was foundational to South India’s international textile trade.⁴⁵

41 Maloney, “Beginnings.”

42 Hall, “Early Indian Ocean Trade,” 37–51.

43 Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 142–196.

44 Chhabra, *Expansion*.

45 *Economic Atlas of Madras State*, 52.

Foreign demand for the South Indian cotton cloth, silk, and cotton-silk blend, greatly increased during the late Pallava age,⁴⁶ thus encouraging the development of new networked regional centres of cloth production. Inscriptions of the Pallava period provide striking evidence of Kancipuram's growth as the most important weaving centre of that era, responding to this increased domestic and international marketplace potential. Regional weavers sent their products to Kancipuram for wider market distribution. Chola-era inscriptions describe a sophisticated system of cloth production characterized by specialization: raw cotton and silk was acquired and then redistributed to spinners who spun the threads, which were then passed along to weavers who produced the various qualities of cloth, as these were marketed at wholesale or retail by merchants who specialized in cloth sales. All this textile activity centred on Kancipuram, which by the late Pallava era had well-established weaving neighbourhoods, including one that was incorporated and designated as a special *nagaram* textile marketplace dominated by *saliya nagarattar* ("cloth merchants") and enterprising weavers who had become specialists in the marketing of cloth.⁴⁷

Just as Kancipuram was politically, religiously, and economically a special place, so too the merchants of Kanci played special civic roles in their urban environment. By the early eighth century, these Kanci-based merchants had developed a very cordial relationship with the Pallava kings. A significant illustration of this rapport is preserved on the wall of the veranda encircling the Vaikunthaperumal Temple in Kancipuram. There, a series of sculpted scenes and inscribed commentaries depict the accession to the throne of twelve-year-old Nandivarman II (alias Pallavamalla) around 730, following the death of Paramesvaravarman II. That event constituted the alleged Pallava "dynastic revolution" in which a collateral branch of the Pallava household displaced the main line.⁴⁸ A delegation of officials and townspeople appears to have participated in the selection of Pallavamalla and in his subsequent coronation under the name Nandivarman, as the merchants assumed a leading role in the proceedings as one of the major communities within urban Kanci. Although these colourful scenes do not necessarily prove that Pallavamalla was popularly chosen by the merchants and other communities depicted—military subordinates, royal administrators, and priests—they do show that the merchants at that time had assumed a major role in city life and achieved a significant degree of rapport with the court.

Kancipuram's economic activity was perhaps the most crucial factor in the city's subsequent growth. Its origin and durability reflected the advantages of its location in the heart of a major cotton-producing region. It prospered from the cotton production of its village hinterland and the city's networked productivity that depended on its own marketing facilities, the growth of large temples possessing investment funds, and the city's connections with more distant markets in the Bay of Bengal region and beyond. The city flourished subsequent to the development of a vigorous maritime trade as well as extensive hinterland

⁴⁶ Goitein, "Letters and Documents," 196.

⁴⁷ Hall and Spencer, "Economy of Kancipuram."

⁴⁸ Gopalan, *Pallavas of Kanchi*.

commerce. By the eighth century, Kanci became the apex of an integrated, hierarchical southeast Indian system of networked local marketing centres, each of which in turn dominated a cluster of villages within its own marketing territory.⁴⁹ The Kancipuram-centred cloth industry would have been sufficient to attract traders to Kancipuram's marketplace, but the city's eminence as a historical, religious, and political centre further enhanced its commercial importance and its continued prosperity was a matter of importance to the city's royal sovereigns. By the eighth century, Kancipuram—with connections as far as northern India, the Bay of Bengal, and the wider Indian Ocean—had acquired a reputation that would outlast the early dynastic regimes that had enhanced its fortune and prominence as a South Indian religious, political, cultural, and market centre.

This study has addressed the key role of eighth-century transitional networked partnerships among kings, religious clerics, merchants, and landholders on the South Asia continent, as alternatives to widespread militarism. Earlier eclectic continental religious networks were the base for institutionalizing and centralizing regional societies based in linked Hindu religious patronage as the alternative to militarism, localism, and prior segmented Buddhist, Jain, and “tribal” religious sects. This Bhakti Hinduism in seventh- and eighth-century southeast India was socially inclusive since it was derived from earlier rural saint traditions; Bhakti temples were incorporated into annual networked Hindu festivals and ritual cycles that linked secondary temples to “mother” temples (for example, Kancipuram and Chidambaram) that were sustained by Pallava, Chola, and Pandya southeast Indian monarchs as “ritual sovereigns,” who promoted notions of societal inclusion in linked regional units, notably against local self-serving birth/caste hierarchies. Regional societal and religious diversity was inclusive of previous underprivileged socio-economic groups—as opposed to the divisive local Vedic and Smriti Brahman clerics, whose long-standing hierarchical rituals were now localized into the inclusive South Indian Bhakti worship. New temple construction was patronized by South Indian Pallava, Chola, and Pandya kings, and subsequent linked temple ritual cycles, centred in a “mother temple,” were well received among regional temple patrons and clergy. These new and newly refurbished made-in-stone temples and their staff superseded the long-standing elite, the fragmented rural communities, and the segmented *Brahmadeya* landholders in their role as integrative societal agents.⁵⁰ Finally, to properly understand the new networks of South India, they should be situated in the larger context of Indian contact with the wider Indian Ocean realm.

Wider Indian Ocean Context

West Asian fictional tales of “Sinbad the Sailor” demonstrate increased Indian contact with West Asia via the western Indian Ocean. This Indian Ocean maritime passage was

⁴⁹ Heitzman, *City in South Asia*.

⁵⁰ Champakalakshmi, *Religions, Tradition, and Ideology*; Hall, *Networks of Trade*: inclusive networks of *Bhakti* Hindu temples sponsored by royal patrons displaced the prior and locally segmented Buddhist and Jain religion.

an alternative to overland transit on the east-to-west overland “Maritime Silk Road” to China after the establishment of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate capital at Baghdad in 762 CE.⁵¹ Fictional Sinbad tales were based on popular word-of-mouth and the written portrayals of the newly inclusive Indian Ocean realm in a series of Arabic-language geographical texts that provided “first hand” accounts of their author’s eastern and western Indian Ocean travels—often “collections of fact” supplied by others who had made Indian Ocean voyages. Collectively, these West Asian oral and written sources focused on India’s southwestern Malabar coastline, which was the destination of monsoon-season voyages based out of the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. Most West Asian merchants were content to trade for the products that arrived in west coast India ports on ships from the eastern Indian Ocean.

Few West Asian merchants made the complete eastern maritime passage to China. West Asian ships making locally segmented and monsoon-season western Indian Ocean passages to India brought with them copper, African ivory, incense, turtle shells, glassware, and horses, which were exchanged for gold, pearls, silk, cotton, ceramics, a variety of eastern Indian Ocean jungle products (such as aromatic sandalwood and rhinoceros horn, which were believed to have medicinal value), and spices (including Sumatra and India pepper and a variety of Indonesian spices) that arrived via Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian (Parsi), and Jewish traders of West Asian origin, who began to make the southwest Malabar coastline ports of trade their home.

Contemporary Chinese sources state that silk, porcelain, camphor, cloves, sandalwood, cardamoms, and gharuwood were collectively the imports from South Indian harbours that were most in demand.⁵² These Chinese sources also relate that Malabar coast port transactions were generally conducted using gold and silver coins, a statement that is substantiated by contemporary Cairo Geniza letters from Egypt, which report that gold and silk were sometimes used to acquire South Indian merchandise, but that Egyptian dinars coinage were readily accepted as a standard of exchange.⁵³ One surviving letter requests that an agent in India purchase cardamom seeds in local markets, but that red betel nuts that had arrived in Aden were spoiled and recommended that in the future the agent try to secure only white, fresh betel nuts.⁵⁴ Surviving Geniza documents identify southern India as not strictly an importing or exporting region but as a major multidimensional participant in the international trade of Asia.

In Pallava times (575–900 CE), the southeast Indian Mamallapuram coastal port grew from a minor fishing village to become the foremost centre of port activities along the Coromandel coastline. At its height, Mamallapuram was an urban centre with temples and buildings modelled on those of the hinterland Pallava capital at Kancipuram, although on a smaller scale. A fortified citadel on a hill overlooking the urban centre

51 Wink, *Al-Hind*.

52 Wolters, “China Irredenta”; Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, 20–22.

53 Chau Ju-kua, *Zhu Fan Zhi*, 96.

54 Goitein, “Letters and Documents,” 196.

and a royal fleet anchored in the harbour stood guard against naval attack.⁵⁵ This well-defended and impressively constructed port attracted foreign merchants.⁵⁶

The eighth-century southeast Indian Pallava culture spread from the Mamallapuram southeast coastal port to Southeast Asia where numerous remnants of Pallava-related South Indian styles and artefacts have been discovered. One of the more evident archaeological legacy remains is the mid-ninth-century Takuapa temple complex on the western central Malay Peninsula coastline that is attributed to the patronage of Pallava-era merchants of South Indian origin.⁵⁷ The Pallava Bay of Bengal port-of-trade network was so successful that a contemporary manuscript characterized Mamallapuram as “looking prosperous with the number of ships laden with gems, and bear riches, elephants, and other wealth.”⁵⁸ The eighth-century South Indian *Kuvalayamala* text documents Indian merchants who transported horses, elephants, pearls, ivory, and silk in the maritime trade from South India to Southeast Asia and China. Indian merchants were prominent intermediaries in the silk trade between India and China. Seventh-century Tang dynasty embassies by land and sea brought significant quantities of silk in exchange for Buddhist commodities. Until the eleventh century, Chinese monks and sojourners carried silk fabrics, robes, and canopies as donations or merit-making at South Asia religious sites for themselves or on the behalf of others (notably patrons) who could not make the passage. Others carried these commodities as items of exchange that financed their travel.⁵⁹

Many Buddhist monks made extended stopovers at Buddhist pilgrimage sites on their passages by land and sea and returned with religious items required in Buddhist ritual; some made valuable written accounts of their travel.⁶⁰ There was an increasing presence of West Asian Muslim traders in the eastern Indian Ocean that challenged the prior reciprocities among eastern Indian Ocean commercial sojourners and Buddhist monks.⁶¹ An Tamil edict from the southeast Indian Pandya Madurai urban centre in 875 CE acknowledged and accepted the Arab maritime diaspora on the southeast Coromandel coastline, as confirmed in ninth-century Muslim traders’ accounts of their trade circuits

55 The *Mahavamsa* (chap. 47), the Sri Lanka Buddhist monastic chronicle, records that the fleet of Narassimha Pallava (ca. 630 CE) sailed from Mamallapuram to Sri Lanka carrying the Pallava ruler’s Sri Lankan friend Manavamma and part of his army. See Joue-Dubreail, *Pallavas*, 41.

56 Nilakanta Sastri, “Takuapa.”

57 Nilakanta Sastri, “Takuapa,” 25–30; Bronson, “Chinese and Middle Eastern,” 181–200; Lamb, “Takuapa,” 76–86; O’Connor, *Hindu Gods*; Mei et al., “Newly Identified,” 2–17.

58 *Periyaturumadal* of the Bhakti Saint Tirumangar Alvar, 6.2.6, as quoted in Krishna Sastri, *Memoirs*, 1–11.

59 Uddyotana Sūri, *Kuvalayamala*, 65–66; Jain, “Trade and Shipping,” 276–77.

60 Miksic, “Archaeological Evidence,” 253–73; Aciri, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 323–48. By the tenth century, non-religious commodities and trans-shipment of varieties of consumer items displaced Buddhist-related items that had initially sustained Sino-Indian trade by land and sea.

61 Wolters, “Tambralinga”; Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 165–68; Sen, *Buddhism across Asia*.

between West Asia and South India. Western Indian Ocean transit overlapped with the maritime monsoon seasonal circuit between South India and China, which included Sri Lanka, Malay Peninsula, and Sumatra coastline port-of-trade stopovers and points of transition from the eastern Indian Ocean and South China Sea to and from the southeast China port of Guangzhou.⁶²

In sum, the eighth-century south Asian realm was marked by transitional Indian regional societies which were collectively moving from localism to wider varieties of societal integration and productivity. The Indian Ocean was a major factor in bringing together and selectively appropriating useful features of other Indian Ocean civilizations and mixing these with the diversity potentials of South Asia. South Asia's eighth-century societal achievements were the foundation for newly emergent integrated regional "Indianized" societies in South India, based in temple urbanism networks following the demise of the Gupta realm in the northern Gangetic river plain. South and central India were significant forces in the articulation of India's future under the initial eighth-century political authority of the northeast Pala (Buddhist Nalanda), and of the Chalukya, Pallava, Chola, and Pandya (Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu) monarchies that were based in political, religious, and commercial networked urban centres.

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62 Wink, *Al-Hind*; Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*; Wang, *Nanhai Trade*.

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Chapter 3

SOUTHEAST ASIA

John K. Whitmore

WELL KNOWN AS a “crossroads of civilizations,” Southeast Asia has been in contact, directly or indirectly, with many parts of Eurasia for over two millennia. Linked by population movements north from China, east as far as Easter Island in the Pacific, and west to Madagascar and the coast of East Africa, inhabitants of this region have long been connected, mainly by sea, with the rest of the eastern hemisphere.¹ They were well placed in already existing networks when, about 2,000 years ago, other parts of Eurasia, east and west, desired contact across its expanse, pushing routes of commerce and communication to and through Southeast Asia. Specifically, Southeast Asia was linked by water, the maritime silk route, to and benefited from the Indic and Sinitic civilizations of South and East Asia, gaining economically, culturally, and politically.² There were, in addition, overland routes through the mountains north and west that contributed in lesser ways to such exchange. Southeast Asians, maintaining their own indigenous social and cultural patterns, have selectively adopted and adapted the foreign to their own ways of life.

Here I examine three broad areas of the region: the mountain world to its north, the lowland world of the mainland river plains, and the coastal world of the islands.³ In this period, the areas most strongly affected by the trade routes were the northern mountains and the seacoasts. Political developments in the lowlands across the mainland came later, at least in part in reaction to the mountain and coastal activities. I first describe power relations in the region through the seventh century and into the middle of the eighth, then the important belief systems of the eighth century, before returning to power and its significant growth from the middle of the eighth century through the middle of the ninth. In pursuing this topic, I model my approach on that of Hermann Kulke.⁴ Looking at Southeast Asian politics from the sixth to the fifteenth centuries, Kulke saw three phases that succeeded one another: “the local, regional, and imperial.” These phases developed from the chieftainship to the local lord, the regional lord, and ultimately the imperial overlord. In the beginning was the chiefdom, based on the development of proximate local social hierarchy and leadership.⁵ The process was, first,

¹ Hoogervorst, *Southeast Asia*.

² Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road*, chap. 1 (map on 36); Sen, “Buddhism,” 39–41 (maps on 46, 50).

³ Gosling, “Highlands.”

⁴ Kulke, “Early and the Imperial,” 5–8.

⁵ See Carneiro et al., *Chiefdoms*, especially the articles by Lozny (129–53), Chabot et al. (312–22), and Korotayev and Grinin (327–52).

developing a higher power and legitimacy in the immediate locality; second, pushing that power and legitimacy over rival localities in the immediately surrounding area; and, finally, expanding one's power and legitimacy out beyond one's adjacent regions into and over more distant territories. The process involved and followed from increasing interaction and exchange among local societies. It was not a strict unilinear process but one marked by numerous localities with their chiefdoms and the ever-fluctuating power relationships among them. Utilizing data from archaeology, epigraphy, art history, and external texts, especially Chinese (no indigenous texts exist for this period outside epigraphy), the period I am covering, from the mid seventh century to the mid ninth, shows the beginning of this process across the varied territories in and adjacent to Southeast Asia.

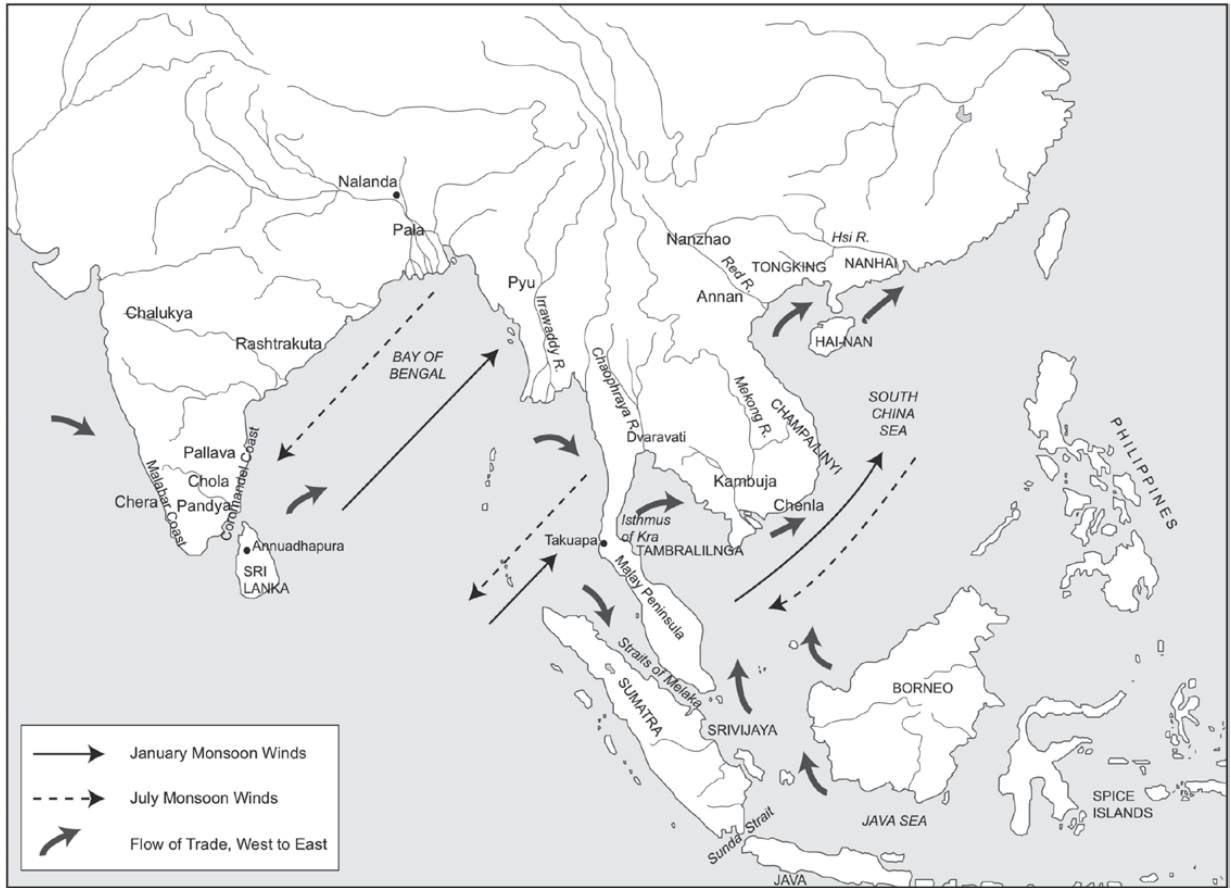
During the first few centuries CE in Southeast Asia, there existed numerous local communities scattered across its mountains, lowlands, and coasts. In the northern mountains, many formed in the stream valleys that cut through the highlands. The lowlands in the mainland had communities sitting on the edges of the great plains, east to west, of the Red, Mekong, Chao Phraya, and Irrawaddy rivers (see [Map 4](#)). Along the coasts of both the mainland and the island regions, communities formed in riverine and harbour areas. Karl Hutterer et al. noted how such diverse communities grew and developed within their particular ecological niches and interacted among themselves, exchanging goods.⁶ Central to this social pattern were, in Wolters' words: "cognate systems of kinship, indifference towards lineage descent, and therefore attached significance to identifying personal achievement in each generation."⁷ Thus, leadership required enhancing one's status in any way possible. I here examine the political, religious, and economic relationships that came about among these numerous communities over these two centuries as affected by the connectivity.

Power, 650–750 CE

By the seventh century, the many mountain valleys lying between the Yangzi valley (now central China) and the lowlands of mainland Southeast Asia saw the growth of a multitude of communities (called *chuan dong* by the Chinese [from a Tai term]). These *chuan dong* were (and are) filled with Tai speakers to the east and Tibeto-Burman speakers to the west, covering the present Chinese provinces of Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan. They were wet-rice growers and formed hierarchical societies led by chiefs and their elites. During the middle of the seventh century, the emerging strength of the great cosmopolitan Tang empire (618–907 CE) of China moved into and strongly affected the centuries-old political balance in these valleys. On the eastern side of this mountain world, Cuan chieftains had gained prominence, only to have it disrupted by the intrusion of the newly centralized Sinic power. On the west, another chieftain, Meng Yu, allied with Tang forces

⁶ Hutterer et al., "Evolutionary Approach," 221–27. See also Clarke, "Skeletons," 326–27; Baker and Pasuk, *Ayutthaya*, 5; James, "Trade, Culture," 27, for such local variation.

⁷ Wolters, *History, Culture*, 151.



Map 4. Southeast Asia, 600-900 CE.
 © Kenneth R. Hall and John K. Whitmore.

and from the middle of the century built his power locally. In this Tibeto-Burman region of the mountain world, there came to exist six (possibly eight) such chiefdoms (or *zhao*), of which the Meng were the southernmost and became known as Nanzhao (the southern chiefdom). As Tibetan power farther west grew, the Meng chiefs were able to utilize the Tang need for local aid to their own advantage. Tibetan moves and Tang countermoves provided the space for the Meng chieftains.

At first one among many *chuan dong*, the Meng, farthest from Tang power, allying with the Tang through the second half of the seventh century, developed as a local power, moving from chieftain to lord. Using their contacts with Chang'an, the great Tang capital, to enhance their local standing, in the early eighth century these Meng lords gained from the rich Tang gifts and titles to stand equal with the other *zhao* (lords). Then, with Tang backing, the Meng began their move to become the regional power. In the 730s, the Meng lord brought the two *zhao* immediately to his north under his control and pushed the other three *zhao* even farther north. By the middle of the eighth century, the Meng and their Nanzhao realm had become the regional lords of the western mountain world, based now in the Dali plain.⁸

As the Meng lords developed their power, to the south across the lowland plains of the mainland the valleys of the Red, Mekong, Chao Phraya, and Irrawaddy rivers, there existed above the higher sea level of that age numerous local walled settlements (*pura* in Khmer, *dun* in Mon). By the early seventh century, the leaders of these communities had begun to establish themselves as local lords, having risen above the chieftains their predecessors had been. As they enhanced their positions in their localities, these lords were unable to achieve the status of regional lord for any length of time or, if achieved, to pass that status on to their successors. Within the broad pattern of multiple local centres, the lords worked to "materialize their authority," to develop their own power in patterns that varied from region to region.⁹ Overall, there was the building of their walled gated settlements, linked to hydraulic construction, in a way that established themselves as local lords. A key element was the introduction of brick manufacture from India and the use of this brick to construct greater walls as well as religious buildings.¹⁰ As Elizabeth Moore expresses it, "One of the many tangible outcomes of contact with South Asia was the use of brick as a building material, its production quickening and widening the scale of landscape intervention."¹¹ In this way, during a time of growth in agriculture and local production, the lords sought to legitimate and portray, in a monumental fashion, their power and authority within their immediate territories and, hopefully, to project them beyond their localities throughout the region.¹² Only in the Red River valley was this not the case. Through the

⁸ Backus, *Nan-chao Kingdom*, chaps. 1–3; Bryson, *Goddess*, 21–26; Fan Cho, *Man Shu*.

⁹ Murphy, "Proto-Dvaravati," 369, following Matthew D. Gallon.

¹⁰ Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 18–20, 131–36, 148–49.

¹¹ Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 131.

¹² Stargardt, *Ancient Pyu*, chaps. 2, 4, 8; Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 19–23, 130–36, 144–48, 224–25, 229; Krech, "Cultural and Ethnic," 334–45; Stark, "Pre-Angkorian," 100; Kim, *Origins*, 140, 183, 198, 200, 205, 225; Gosling, *Origins*, chap. 4; Higham, "Dawn of History," 423–37; Higham and Thosarat, *Early Thailand*, 222–49; Hutangkura, "Palaeo-Shoreline," 61–63; Ray, "Multi-religious Linkages," 149–50; Lertcharnrit, "Phromthin Tai"; Murphy, "Proto-Dvaravati"; Murphy and Stark,

seventh century and half of the eighth, Tang forces prevented the emergence of local lords as had occurred in the sixth century. Thereby did the Chinese name this region the “pacified south,” Annan. Even so, their hold was stronger in the lowlands than in the adjacent mountain valleys. The Chinese influence was strongest in trade and Buddhism, with little of classical thought making an impact here, and not at all in the rest of the region.¹³

The pattern of walled settlement may be seen from the centres of the Pyu (Srikssetra to Halin) in the Irrawaddy valley, of Dvaravati (some sixty-three settlements from Khu Bua to Haripunchai) in the Chao Phraya valley, and of Kambujadesa (between twenty-five and thirty settlements from Angkor Borei to Wat Phu) in the Mekong valley and up its eastern tributaries (reaching towards Champa), what Elizabeth Moore refers to as “the walled site context.”¹⁴ As with the Meng lords of Nanzhao, these lords too utilized contacts with external courts and civilizations to enhance their local power and authority, varying by region. The Khmer lords of Kambujadesa employed stone inscriptions in the Sanskrit language and built Hindu Saivite temples with their phallic *lingas* (symbols of Siva) to establish their presence in their own and other locations, to reflect the sacred and cosmic nature of their authority, and to proclaim their own high status (as *raja*).¹⁵ Lords of the Dvaravati and Pyu worlds in turn produced silver coins with varied royal and sacred Indic symbols and Buddhist stupas and images. There were also the stone *dharmacakras* (wheels of the law) with Khmer elements spread across the Dvaravati region. In such ways, the many lords competed with each other in establishing their local status and seeking to expand it.¹⁶ As Hiram Woodward described the Chao Phraya region, a great variety of cultural influences existed from all directions, criss-crossing the mainland with each locality applying these influences in its own fashion, synchronically and diachronically.¹⁷ The differences among them pertain to the opportunities the local lords had, and these opportunities depended on the particular communication routes that made them available to the lords. The Khmer chiefs derived their knowledge from the Oc Eo coastal connection with the earlier international maritime route that supplied them with a Sanskrit and Saivite physical complex of inscriptions and temples.¹⁸ The

“Introduction,” 333–40; Glover, “Prehistoric and Historic”; Lorrillard, “Pre-Angkorian,” 198–202; O’Reilly and Shewan, “Phum Lovea,” 475; Evans et al., “Sites, Survey,” 444–55, 465–66; Talbot, “Before Angkor,” 79–81; Baker and Pasuk, *Ayutthaya*, 8, 15–17, 24, 42.

13 Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, chaps. 4–5.

14 Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 146; Moore and Sun Win, “Sampanago,” 219–26; Aung-Thwin, *Mists of Ramanna*, 15–26, 30, 39–40; Stargardt, *Ancient Pyu*; Goh, “Settlement Patterns”; O’Reilly and Shewan, “Phum Lovea,” 469–75, 482; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 252–55; James, “Trade, Culture,” 44–46; Talbot, “Before Angkor,” 80.

15 Vickery, *Society, Economics*, chap. 3; Thompson, *Engendering*, 35, 45; Lustig, Evans, and Richards, “Words across Space,” 6–8, 12 (maps), 15, 19.

16 Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 42–44; Wicks, *Money, Markets*, chaps. 4–6; Brown, *Dvaravati Wheels*, [xx] for map, chap. 3; Gosling, *Origins*, chap. 4; Aung-Thwin, *Mists of Ramanna*, 24, 28, 35–36; Murphy, “Quantitative and Demographic,” 92–95 (map on 93); Baker and Pasuk, *Ayutthaya*, 18–20.

17 Woodward, *Art and Architecture*, 51–116. See also Polkinghorne, “Under the Glaze,” 333–35.

18 Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 156–83.

Dvaravati and Pyu chiefs had access across the Bay of Bengal which brought them a Buddhist mercantile complex leading to coins and stupas. The Tibeto-Burman Pyu also had links up into the mountain world, the hills and valleys of Nanzhao, which brought them gold and silver.¹⁹

With the chiefs across the lowlands of the mainland working to enhance their status, how successful were they by the middle of the eighth century? Many had become local lords as the regions saw the proliferation of well-established political bases. Using further enhancements, such as the coins of the Chao Phraya and the Irrawaddy valleys and the inscriptions and *lingas* of the Mekong valley, some of these lords strove to become regional lords and succeeded, however temporarily. To all appearances, this occurred mainly in the middle Mekong region during the seventh century. In the fifth and sixth centuries, with navigational changes, a major shift in the maritime route had occurred, as ships began to go through the Strait of Melaka and directly on to the Chinese ports, not merely hugging the mainland coast as before. With the decline of the old maritime route along the coast, political power shifted up the Mekong valley during the sixth and seventh centuries and began to reach west into other areas. The lords built their Saivite temples and set up their inscriptions claiming *raja/rajadhiraja/maharajadhiraja* status.²⁰ Here there were “kings” (in the Indic fashion) named Bhavavarman, Isanavarman, Jayavarman (I), and the latter’s daughter (through the seventh century), who established themselves as regional lords (mainly at Isanapura/Sambor Prei Kuk). Piphah Heng notes how such lords appear to have “incorporated/absorbed/consolidated/agglomerated” other local centres (chiefdoms) into their regional realms. Yet their sons became local lords in their own right and maintained the multiplicity of political centres through the eighth century.²¹ In the Dvaravati and Pyu regions, some lords (primarily in Nakhon Pathom and Beikthano respectively) appear to have gained a certain degree of regional power, but if they did, it was not well marked and probably did not last long.²² Local variability, not any regional standardization, remained the norm.

As these lords across the mainland developed their power, coastal and maritime communities were adjusting to the major changes in the maritime routes of the fifth and sixth centuries and the wealth and ideas moving along the intercontinental sea lanes. The major survivor of the old route across the Kra Isthmus of the northern Malay Peninsula was the port settlement (now Hô An) in Champa at the mouth of the Thu Bôn river (in what is now central Vietnam). Oc Eo, near the southern tip of the eastern mainland, and its regional lordship (called by the Chinese Funan) had gone into decline

19 Gosling, *Origins*, 56–57; Moore, *Early Landscapes*, chap. 5; Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 198–219.

20 A lintel from one temple in this period shows the lord’s consecration/initiation (*abhiseka*) in direct relation to Siva, applying Indic concepts in a unique local fashion (Southworth, “Lintel of Vat”).

21 Vickery, *Society, Economics*, chap. 8; Griffiths, “Stèle d’Installation”; Lavy, “As in Heaven”; Lustig, Evans, and Richards, “Words across Space,” 12, 15, 19 (maps), 22–23; Lorrillard, “Pre-Angkorian,” 193–96, 206–7, 211; Higham, *Early Mainland*, 421–23, 436; Heng, “Transition”; Evans et al., “Sites, Survey,” 455–67; Chemburkar and Kapoor, “Pasupata Sect.”

22 Moore, *Early Landscapes*, chap. 5; Stargardt, “From the Iron Age”; Murphy, “Proto-Dvaravati,” 382–83, drawing on Karen Mudar’s research.

as the maritime route shifted to the Strait of Melaka and went across the sea straight to Guangzhou (Canton), stopping only in Champa. The latter comprised a number of short river valleys and their settlements, of which that in the Thu Bồn valley was the largest.²³ These communities, while in close contact with China, had, like those of the Khmer along the Mekong, been strongly influenced from Oc Eo by Saivism and its *linga* cult.

The reunification of China under first the Sui (581–617 CE) and then the Tang dynasties saw China's newly rising wealth greatly stimulate the maritime trade. The port in Champa was able to thrive on this enriched trade, leading the local lord to construct a major Saiva complex in brick (its style similar and linked to those on the Mekong) at Mỹ Sơn. The main settlement in the Thu Bồn valley was Trà Kiệu, lying between the port downstream and the religious centre of Mỹ Sơn upstream. The lords of this territory, which they named Champa after an Indian site, ruled from the first half of the sixth century into the middle of the eighth. While sacked by Sui forces in 605 CE and losing much wealth, the lords continued to maintain their power and had links with Mekong lords. Despite contention among other lords up and down the coast, Trà Kiệu and its port formed the site of the major local lord and perhaps of a regional lord.²⁴ Flourishing, its lords sent sixteen missions to the Tang until 669 before a break until 686 CE. Why 686? It may be that Trà Kiệu was reacting to the sudden rise of Srivijaya on the southeast coast of Sumatra (see below). Inspired by the latter's move to control shipping and trade at the juncture of the Strait of Melaka and the Java and South China seas, Trà Kiệu must have rushed to strengthen its contact with the Tang. The lords of Champa proceeded to keep up this profitable contact into the mid eighth century, sending at least fifteen more missions to Chang'an.²⁵

The upheaval that stirred this response came about in the Musi river system of southern Sumatra. Out of this riverine environment, local lords developed a maritime polity called Srivijaya which dominated the coastal world in the western islands of modern Indonesia. Already established in the 670s CE, the power of this polity expanded rapidly in the following decade. Contemporary inscriptions planted in modern Palembang and in areas immediately adjacent to it show the ruler employing mystic power (*siddhi*) to rise from local lord to regional lord, integrating an Indic political style with local patterns. The power of this settlement spread to dominate the coasts of the Strait region, controlling the sea and its trade. Ships and merchants on the maritime route, with their goods and beliefs, passed through and sojourned at Srivijaya's main port (believed to have been Palembang), for religious study (Buddhism) as well as for profit. The Srivijaya lords moved their influence upriver and inland as well as east against the northwest coast of Java. Drawing on already existing production of both mountain goods of Sumatra and the famed spices from the Moluccas to the east across the Java Sea, they put these goods into the maritime route and spread them throughout

²³ Higham, *Early Mainland*, 316 (map).

²⁴ Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*; Manguin, "Early Maritime Polities," 301–4; Southworth (William), "Coastal States," 220–28; Higham, *Early Mainland*, 326–27; Sahai, *Bhadresvara*, 89–91.

²⁵ Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 26.

Eurasia to China, India, the Mediterranean, and Europe. By 700 CE, the Srivijaya ruler had become an imperial lord, the strongest in Southeast Asia, and sent missions to the Tang into the 740s.²⁶

Srivijaya's prosperity came from the integrated hinterland/maritime system that its lords maintained into the eighth century. Existing at the key point of maritime interaction between Southeast Asia and the world, east and west, their system formed the major segment in the Eurasian sea route as they controlled the shipping and flow of trade through their seas. This control allowed the spread of both Srivijaya naval power and the strong Buddhist currents of the age. The influence of these lords struck the northwest coast of Java and penetrated inland. This carried the Indic model of the *raja*—though initially Hindu (Saivite) and not Buddhist—into the rich volcanic rice-bearing land of central Java, Mataram. Through the first half of the eighth century, a local chieftain grew into a local lord (*raja*) and then a regional one (*maharaja*). A builder of small Saivite temples with their *lingas* (as in contemporary Kambujadesa and Champa), Sanjaya spoke of “Java” under his direction as a rich and good place in which to live as he drew other chiefs and lords into alliance with his community on the Dieng Plateau. An important trade route linked his territory to the north coast and the Java Sea. Planting his feet on their heads, as Julie Romain states, he and his successors “incorporate an amalgamation of architectural motifs found across South India at this time with local stylistic elements which make them uniquely Javanese.”²⁷

How far into island Southeast Asia did the maritime routes reach? And did they go beyond the region into other parts of the world? The maritime contacts lay mainly in the western part of what is now Indonesia, though commercial and religious elements did reach into the eastern segment, especially the Moluccas with their spices. What is now the Philippines and its chiefdoms had some maritime contact, especially with Champa, but little major impact from it. The world of Oceania lay out beyond this eastern edge of Southeast Asia, particularly the seas of the Polynesians. Given the wind and current patterns as well as the lack of commercial goals beyond the Moluccas, little connectivity existed there in these centuries. As Barbara Watson Andaya states, “Oceania was essentially unaffected by the great religious, political, and economic influences that swept across Asia.”²⁸

26 Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*; Wolters, “Studying Śrīvijaya”; Hall, “State and Statecraft”; Hall, *History*, 108–20; Manguin, “Early Maritime Politics,” 304–8; Andaya, *Leaves*, 52–58; Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *Malay Peninsula*, chap. 9; Ali, “Early Inscriptions,” 286–90; Skilling, “Untraced Buddhist,” 25; Woodward, “Esoteric Buddhism,” 335–36; Griffiths, “Inscriptions of Sumatra,” 148–51. For the latest discussions of Srivijaya, see Kulke, “Srivijaya Revisited”; and Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 257–58, 289–306.

27 Romain, “Indian Architecture,” 300; Andaya, *Leaves*, 56; Hall, *History*, 120–22; Manguin, “Archaeology,” 304–5; Christie, “Revisiting Early Mataram,” 26–33; Christie, “Water and Rice,” 237–43; Sundberg, “State of Mataram”; Miksic, “Classical Cultures,” 240–42; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 310–11.

28 Andaya, *Leaves*, 33–41, quotation at 37.

In the 750s, throughout Southeast Asia, there existed one imperial lord of Srivijaya, regional lords in Nanzhao and Mataram, and numerous local lords in the agricultural lowlands on the mainland. Some of the latter attained regional status for periods of time. In the Mekong valley, such achievements were temporary and unsustainable, the influence of their localities shrinking on the deaths of these lords, as lords of competing localities sought to maintain and expand their own power.

Beliefs: Hindu and Buddhist

The seventh and early eighth centuries in Southeast Asia saw the continued emergence of its local lords at a time of major change in India.²⁹ They built settlements with walls and moats (particularly with the brick technology), constructing Saivite temples and Buddhist stupas and adopting Indic and Sinic patterns of cosmic rule to their localities. With no overall control in any region, the many localities adopted these patterns each in their own varied manner. Since rule remained local, the lord of each place utilized what was available to him in his own particular pattern. This may be seen in the architecture, the inscriptions, the coins, and the expression of each lord's style of rule.

Local religious beliefs centred on the spirits, ancestral, natural, heroic, violent, that inhabited the territory and their potential for good or ill. Blending with this local pattern, a complex variety of Hindu and Buddhist elements came to exist in Southeast Asia as Indian Brahmins and Buddhists travelled by sea and sought to replicate their sacred space there (via temples/stupas and ritual).³⁰ Each region of Southeast Asia had its own major pattern of belief, whether Hindu or Buddhist, though neither was totally exclusive in any one area. Syncretization occurred, and the lord of each locality with his own language chose his specific blend to achieve, in Nicolas Revire's words "merit, power, and blessings." Sanskrit became the dominant language in most of the local belief systems to achieve this.³¹ I look first at areas with Hindu dominance, then at regions of Buddhist domination, particularly the contemporary dynamic tide of Mahayana/ Esoteric Tantric beliefs expanding across Southeast Asia and Asia at large.

Where in the fifth to seventh centuries Visnuite belief existed in the coastal world and up the Mekong, the seventh and eighth centuries saw strong Saivite cults on the eastern coast of Champa, up the Mekong River, and in central Java. In these areas, there was a strong affinity between the rise of local lords and the establishment of Saivite temples with their *lingas*. As the many and varied lintels of Kambujadesa show, great variety existed among the many localities.³² Their lords took on Indic *raja*-ship of the Lord Siva

²⁹ Brown, *Dvaravati Wheels*, 318, 329; Kulke, "Concept of Convergence."

³⁰ Revire, "Dvaravati and Zhenla," 416; Ray, "Multi-Religious Linkages"; Noonsuk, "New Evidence"; Lorrillard, "Pre-Angkorian," 211; Revire, "Dvaravati and Zhenla"; Baker and Pasuk, *Ayutthaya*, 11-13; Ly, "Broken Threads," 467-70, 475 (following Wolters, "Khmer 'Hinduism'"); Bronkhorst, "Spread of Sanskrit"; Sen, "Buddhism," 42-51; Chemburkar and Kapoor, "Pasupata Sect."

³¹ Ali, "Early Inscriptions," 280-84, 290-91; Revire, "Dvaravati and Zhenla."

³² Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 44-46, 50-51, 122-29, 134-35, 165-67; Southworth, "Lintel of Vat"; Polkinghorne, "Under the Glaze," 337-43; Polkinghorne, "Decorative Lintels"; Lorrillard,

via their temples and inscriptions, enhancing their local and potentially regional status.³³ Adopting and identifying oneself through asceticism with Siva and his rites portrayed the lords as triumphant and protective, masters of their domains as focused in their *lingas*. Partaking in Siva's status and power, the rites transcended local claims and, in Paul Lavy's terms, "legitimated, sanctified, and maintained" the lords. Available to all chiefs and lords scattered throughout these territories, they could achieve local lordship and occasionally regional lordship, however difficult to sustain.³⁴

In the other river valleys of the central and western mainland, the Irrawaddy and the Chao Phraya, the inspiration for lordly enhancement was Buddhist with brick stupas. By the seventh century, Buddhism had been in these two valleys for several centuries and now was aiding the political developments of the time. By building stupas, the lords in Dvaravati drew monks to their communities and took on the cosmic role of *cakravartin* (universal ruler), rolling their wheels of the law (*dharmacakra*) across the landscape. These lords incorporated both indigenous customs and Indic-inspired patterns, marking that lord's "wisdom and virtue" and his territory's "security and prosperity." The seventh and eighth centuries saw Dvaravati lords utilize Khmer elements and construct (or reconstruct) buildings as they pursued greater enhancement of their status locally and beyond.³⁵

While the mainland lords and their Buddhism were developing locally (at times regionally), a new wave with elements of esoteric and magical Buddhism was moving through the seas, along the coasts, and into the island and mainland worlds. This movement followed the trade routes and formed part of the great circular path from China through Central Asia to India and back across the South Seas (Nan Yang) (and vice versa). Centred on cults of the active and powerful bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Tara),³⁶ it scattered across Southeast Asia, from the Malay Peninsula to the Philippines, from

"Pre-Angkorian," 207–11; Talbot, "Before Angkor," 79; Ly, "Broken Threads," 469–70; Tingley, "Avalokitesvara," pl. 43; Chembukar and Kapoor, "Pasupata Sect."

33 Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 130–34, 144–56; Manguin, "Early Maritime Polities," 304–5; Noonsuk, *Tambralinga*, 74–97, 149–57; Lavy, "As in Heaven," 23–26; Lavy, "Conch-on-Hip Images"; Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *Malay Peninsula*, chap. 5; Tingley, "Avalokitesvara," pls. 39, 44, 45; Chemburkar and Kapoor, "Pasupata Sect."

34 Lavy, "As in Heaven," 25–39; Noonsuk, *Tambralinga*, 107–57; Wolters, "Khmer 'Hinduism,'" 427–42; Vickery, *Society, Economics*, chap. 5, 139–74, 207–10, 374–75; Le Thi, "Hindu Deities."

35 Stargardt, *Ancient Pyu*, chaps. 5, 7, 286–90; Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 142–44, 153, 163–64, 169–71, 175–79, 201–2; Moore and Win, "Sampanago"; Gosling, *Origins*, 60–73; Brown, *Dvaravati Wheels*, pts. 1–3; James, "Trade, Culture," 41–45; Murphy, "Buddhist Architecture"; Murphy, "Quantitative and Demographic," 82–94; Gallon, "Monuments and Identity"; Revire, "Glimpses"; Indorf, "Dvaravati Cakras," 286; Guy, "Tamil Merchants," 252–53; Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 198–211; Woodward, *Art and Architecture*, 51–80; Aung-Thwin, *Mists of Ramanna*, 30–34; Wicks, *Money, Markets*, 112–21, 158–63. Indorf ("Dvaravati Cakras," 295–305) argues for "hierarchical nuances of lineage branch and individual identity" in the *dharmacakra*.

36 Keyworth, "Avalokitesvara"; Skilling, "Circulation of Ritual," 374–77, 379; Leidy, "Interstices of Compassion"; Koezuka, "Avalokitesvara Images," 318–22, 324–25; Tingley, *Arts of Ancient Viet Nam*, pls. 54, 59; Tu, "Sinitic Transfers."

Java to the mainland and up into the northern mountains. Many teachings, exoteric and esoteric, floated about, loosely connected and selected eclectically in the different locales. Inscriptions and sculptures in varied materials, together with architecture, spread widely. Texts, selections of texts, fragments of texts, and created phrases (written and aural), particularly verses, were recorded in both Sanskrit and Pali in many locales, notably the created *ye dharma* (dealing with the fundamental law of causation) phrase. Linked to stupas and images of stupas of varying types, but distinctly Southeast Asian in a tiered form, the verses tell of a complexity from the intersections of many currents of Buddhist beliefs adapted to local conditions and demands. Emerging in the world of the mid to late eighth century were elements of the broad Asian Esoteric/Tantric Vajra (Thunderbolt) beliefs.³⁷

Through the seventh and eighth centuries, such newly developed Buddhism (referred to as secret [esoteric]) spread across the trade and communication routes of Asia, carrying teachings, texts, and sacred objects and particularly bringing cosmic might to the lords. Individuals with these beliefs brought initiation/coronation (*abhiseka*) rituals and sacred power (*siddhi*) by protective rites and incantations (*dharanis*) that enhanced the dominion of the lords, bringing them into the divine; in Hiram Woodward's words, "the ritual entering of a circle of divinities (a *mandala*) and ... the recitation of sacred formulas (*mantra*)."³⁸ These recently developed concepts allowed local lords to enhance their power and protection. In the process, each place created its own mix of internal and external elements. Within the broad Mahayana field of belief, many ideas were swirling around as the public (exoteric) and sacred (esoteric) had not yet separated significantly. They formed a broadly linked whole, as illustrated in the great Borobudur monument of Mataram (see below). Within this broad Mahayana belief (in bodhisattvas), there was the Mantranaya system of practice and the Tantric pattern of sacred power.³⁹

Lords of Srivijaya employed this belief system, with their *siddhi and siddhayatra* (sacred missions). As these beliefs spread through the island world, they penetrated Java through the northwestern coastal region of Walaing/Kalinga, reaching Mataram as

37 Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 179; Skilling, "Circulation of Ritual," 375–78; Skilling, "Untraced Buddhist Verse"; Edwards McKinnon, "Bronze Hoard"; Talbot, "Before Angkor," 82; Jacq-Hergoualc'h, *Malay Peninsula*, chaps. 6–8, 11; Griffiths, "Inscriptions of Sumatra," 142–46; Griffiths, "Written Traces," 138, 146, 148, 161, 164, 166, 189; Murphy, "*Sema* Stones," 360–66; Baker and Pasuk, *Ayutthaya*, 14; Revire, "New Perspectives"; Revire, "Glimpses," 246–47, 253–65; Lertcharnit, "Phromthin Tai," 121; Ray, "Multi-religious Linkages," 139; Miksic, "Archaeological Evidence," 253–60, 265–66, 273; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 295; Crujisen et al., "Cult of the Buddhist"; Orlina, "Epigraphical Evidence"; Brown, "Gupta-Period Sculpture," 319–23; Sen, "Buddhism," 51–55; Kyaw Minn Htin, "Early Buddhism." I derived much from the discussion at the conference, "Dynamic Buddhism in Premodern and Early Modern Southeast Asia," in Singapore, 2011.

38 Woodward, "Esoteric Buddhism," 330.

39 Acri, "Introduction," 1–19; Woodward, "Esoteric Buddhism"; Skilling, "Circulation of Ritual," 378–79; Leidy, "Interstices of Compassion," 303–6, 311; Bryson, *Goddess*, 192n64.

shown in Old Malay inscriptions found there. These beliefs took root during the late eighth and early ninth centuries leading to the construction of the great Buddhist monuments, Candi Kelasan, Sewu, Plaosan, Ratubaka, Mendut, and eventually the Borobudur over several decades (see below), informed by major scholarship of numerous Sanskrit texts and produced by local hands. These temples, celebrating the bodhisattva Manjusri as well as Avalokitesvara (Tara), reflected the conjoining of local and transregional elements (especially from the Pala in Bengal and the Abhayagiri of Sri Lanka), dealing in part, as Levin notes, with “the concepts and rituals of kingship.”⁴⁰ Borobudur demonstrates this blend: the *mantranaya* (practice regarding the fundamental law of cause and effect) in the lower galleries with the esoteric (superior/secret) and its *Dharmadhatu* (true reality) in the terraces above. Initiation (*abhiseka*) brought one from the lower to the upper and its sacred power. Mataram became an important hub in the trans-Asian Buddhist system of the day.⁴¹

Elements of these Buddhist developments in the maritime world also penetrated the older Buddhist world of the mainland. Nakon Pathom in the Chao Phraya valley and sites in the Mun and Chi valleys (of modern northeast Thailand) flowing into the central Mekong River show newer influences shared with central Java.⁴² Such Buddhist temples were flourishing in the Red River valley as well, under the auspices of the southern Tang protectorate, as monks sojourned (and sometimes settled) there, practising, teaching, and translating. Avalokitesvara was important here as well.⁴³ This pattern of *bodhisattvas* proceeded up the Irrawaddy valley from Sriksetra as far north as the walled settlement of Halin, especially significant for its valued salt and its connections with Nanzhao. Through this Pyu link with their northern mountain neighbours (as well undoubtedly via Tibet), the lords of Nanzhao gained tantric Buddhism. They would build many temples with images, and the *bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara stood out in their beliefs.⁴⁴

40 Levin, “*Dharma and Artha*,” 28.

41 Woodward, “Esoteric Buddhism,” 337–43; Woodward, “Bianhong”; Sundberg, “Considerations”; Griffiths, “Inscriptions of Sumatra,” 146–56; Griffiths, “Imbossed Image of Siva”; Fontein, “Monument of Avatamsaka”; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 312, 314–15, 319–32; Kandahjaya, “*San Hyan Kamahayanikan*”; Bautze-Picron, “Images of Devotion,” 167–68, 172, 175–77, 184; Klokke, “Art Historical Evidence”; Levin, “*Dharma and Artha*”; Ong, “Creative Sculptural Process”; Sinclair, “Coronation and Liberation”; Chemburkar, “Borobudur’s Pala Forebear”; Goble, “Esoteric Buddhism,” 133–37; Tingley, “Avalokitesvara”; Kyaw Minn Htin, “Early Buddhism,” 402; Nicolas, “Early Musical Exchange,” 350–51.

42 Revire, “Re-exploring the Buddhist”; Murphy, “Quantitative and Demographic”; Gosling, *Origins*, 107–13; Brown, *Dvaravati Wheels*, 39–41; Davidson, “*Abhiseka*”; Copp, “*Dharani* Scriptures”; Crujisen et al., “Cult of the Buddhist”; Sharrock and Bunker, “Seeds of Vajrabodhi,” 244–52; Leidy, “Interstices of Compassion,” 304–5.

43 Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, 210–12; Whitmore, “Buddhist Monarchy,” 285; Nguyen, *Zen*, 105–11, 164–74.

44 Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 140, 171, 179, 184–85, 199–200, 209; McRae, “Popular Religion”; Sun Laichen, personal communication (January 10, 2005); Backus, *Nan-chao Kingdom*, 56, 128–29, 159–60; Aung-Thwin, *Mists of Ramanna*, 21–24, 31; Kyaw Minn Htin, “Early Buddhism,” 402; Bryson, *Goddess*, 31–36.

What was travelling along these maritime and riverine routes in these years were beliefs in this particular *bodhisattva* as well as in the future Buddha Maitreya. Here we see, in Peter Skilling's words "production of unique iconographic forms."⁴⁵ The presence of locally devised triads was also reflected in Theravada triads of the Buddha flanked by subservient Hindu gods, attendants, stupas, or other symbolic items. These triads and the *bodhisattvas* existed in many parts of Southeast Asia. They appeared in the Chao Phraya and Irrawaddy valleys, going through the latter into the northern mountains while also spreading from the Malay Peninsula into varied parts of the island world, southern Sumatra, central Java, and the Sulawesi Strait region. Musical patterns followed much this same path. Offering protection and shelter from the ills of life, as Lord of the World Lokeshvara, this *bodhisattva* provided power and status for lords of Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ Within this broad Buddhist field, a number of sites had lords who utilized the new Buddhism in their rule. One local lord, of Canasa in the Mun river system near the central Mekong River, developed a cult of Avalokitesvara with striking large bronze images of this *bodhisattva*. The two major realms of Srivijaya and Nanzhao, both regional lords at this time, used this newer pan-Asian Buddhism to strengthen and broaden their regimes.⁴⁷

Power, 750–850 CE

As the lords of Srivijaya expanded their realm towards imperial power through the middle of the eighth century, the many local and occasionally regional lords in the river valleys of the mainland maintained their positions, and the Nanzhao lords developed their power against their western and northern competitors, the Tibetans and the Tang. Over the next century, coastal forces to the south and mountain forces in the north built on the power and beliefs developed to expand from regional into imperial realms and bring great pressures on the lords of the mainland.

On the south, the great expansion of power began in central Java. There the Sailendras (lords of the mountain) established their major Mahayana/Vajrayana regime, Mataram, which encompassed the Saivite region of the lords on the Dieng Plateau. An alliance took place linking Saivite inland lords and Buddhist coastal lords of Walaing. Under a series of long-reigning lords (later eighth to early ninth centuries), the Sailendras, employing

⁴⁵ Skilling, "Circulation of Ritual," 279.

⁴⁶ Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 226–48, 250–63; Brown, *Dvaravati Wheels*, 84–90; Moore, *Early Landscapes*, 172, 199; Skilling, "Circulation of Ritual," 375, 377–79; Nicolas, "Early Musical Exchange."

⁴⁷ Manguin, "Coastal States," 114–15; Guy, "Avalokitesvara"; Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 114–15, 234–38, 252–55; Wolters, "Studying Śrīvijaya," 31–32; Hall, *History*, 114–19; Revire, "Glimpses," 244; Revire, "Dvaravati and Zhenla," 414; Higham, "Dawn of History," 422; Evans et al., "Sites, Survey," 459; Sharrock and Bunker, "Seeds of Vajrabodhi," 250; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 251, 258–59; James, "Trade, Culture," 43; Talbot, "Before Angkor," 77–78, 84–85; Backus, *Nan-chao Kingdom*, 18, 56, 128–29; McRae, "Popular Religion"; Tingley, "Avalokitesvara," pl. 59; Kyaw Minn Htin, "Early Buddhism," 402; Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung," 71–75; Bryson, *Goddess*, 31–34, 44–46, 60–61; Bryson, "Limits of Chinese Buddhism"; Sun Laichen, personal communication (January 10, 2005).

the *abhiseka* (initiation/consecration) rite, developed first as a strong inland regional power before expanding to the north coast and then out into the Srivijayan maritime space. There they became an imperial power, the strongest and most threatening of the age within Southeast Asia. Carrying both indigenous and Sanskritic identities (*rake/raja*), these lords held their *abhiseka* rites which declared their realm anew within the Indic cosmos.⁴⁸

As the lords of Mataram (now *maharajas*) built their power on these localities through the second half of the eighth century and into the early ninth, they extended north to the coast and east into the upper reaches of the rivers. This realm became a regional power that began to build the great Buddhist monuments, culminating in the complex and unique stupa/mandala of the Borobudur, greatest of all the religious constructions of the age in Southeast Asia. Akin to the *dharmacakras* (wheels of the law) in the Chao Phraya valley, the Borobudur was at one level a teaching device, meant to enlighten the populace, while awing with its might and the divine status of its lords. Overall, as part of the broad field of the newer Mahayana/esoteric tantric Buddhism, the Javanese monuments exemplified the contacts and beliefs of this field. Bengalis, Gujaratis, Singhalese, and others contributed to its growth as the lords constructed their centres of belief and power. In central Java, the lordly bodhisattva Manjusri and the future Buddha Maitreya played major roles in the lords' ritual.⁴⁹

The Sailendra lords consolidated their power structure locally and regionally and, via the north coast of Java, tapped into the strong maritime Buddhist currents. They then proceeded into the maritime space controlled by Srivijaya, which became what John Guy calls "the Sailendra world."⁵⁰ There the two, the Sailendra and Srivijaya realms, merged their operations and dominated these seas and coasts. This activity included both trade and warfare. The commerce involved central Java's rice and spices from the eastern islands, while the attacks gained wealth and spread Java's power throughout the sea lanes. The warfare was recorded along the eastern seaboard of the mainland in the second half of the eighth century, attacking major centres of Champa and the southern Tang protectorate of Annan (later Dai Viet) where a local chief, Phung Hung, took control for several years. In 767, 774, and 787 CE (with others unrecorded?), feared ships of Java and the Malay coasts struck (perhaps even going up the Mekong as well), targeting and destroying sacred centres.⁵¹ The wealth and power of the imperial Sailendra lords was quite capable of this rapid expansion, expressing in Buddhist terms

48 Christie, "Early Mataram," 34–40; Christie, "Water and Rice," 239–47, 255; Sundberg, "State of Mataram," 17–24; Hall, *History*, 122–24, 126–28; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 310–13. See also Long, *Voices*, especially 30–31, 41, 212.

49 Gomez and Woodward, *Barabudur*; Woodward, "Bianhong"; Fontein, "Sarira of Borobudur"; Fontein "Monument of Avatamsaka"; Kandahjaya, "San Hyan Kamahayanikan."

50 Guy, "Tamil Merchants," 247–48.

51 Christie, "Revisiting Early Mataram," 35, 39; Long, *Voices*, 43–47, 267–68; Griffiths, "Ancient Name Java"; Hall, *History*, 124–26; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 312–13; Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, 201–8; Dutton et al., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 23–24.

(symbolized by the triad Padmapani [Avalokitesvara], Sakyamuni, and Vajrapani) their eminence.⁵²

The impact of this Javanese dominance hit Champa. Through the middle of the eighth century, the power centre of this land shifted from the Thu Bôn valley south down the coast to the Panduranga/Kauthara region. Under the regional lord Satyavarman, linked to powers in the lower and middle Mekong valley to the west, in the 770s and 780s, Panduranga developed its own strong local tradition and interacted with both the Khmer and the Javanese realms.⁵³ The strength of Java was so great that both Cham and Khmer lords made major efforts to fend off its might. While Saivite, Satyavarman engaged with Buddhist institutions of the Khmer and the Javanese. The Javanese attacks protected the Thu Bôn power (now called Huanwang, circle of kings, by the Chinese) on both north and south (vs. Annan and Panduranga respectively). Indeed, after missions to China in 793 and 797 (and again in 809), Huanwang itself attacked the coasts of Annan in 802–809 and 824 (in the latter joined by a mountain chief).⁵⁴ Struck by Javanese warships, Panduranga twice had their major temples and *lingas* destroyed or stolen and had to reconstruct and reconsecrate them. Operating in this threatening environment, the Panduranga lords involved themselves with Khmer and Javanese institutions, particularly the Abhayagiri, with their magic to ward Javanese power off Khmer (and undoubtedly their own) territory.⁵⁵

It is no surprise that (1) a future Khmer lord on the Mekong was in Java; (2) on his return, this lord held a certain respect for (if not fear of) Javanese power, sacred and profane; and (3) this was vividly remembered centuries later. In the late eighth century, the Sailendra capital and court formed a major Asian centre, such that many figures from across the seas visited there. Not that far from the Mekong valley, Java was within easy reach for a Khmer traveller; indeed, it was actually too close in terms of its seagoing might. This lord, Jayavarman (seen as II), was in Java as Sailendra power grew (and as the Borobudur began to be built). Back from Java, this lord was determined to build his own power and to isolate it from the perceived threat of Java. At this time, a number of local lords maintained their power up the Mekong valley. Jayavarman, returning to Kambujadesa, began in the south (the lower Mekong valley), calling for the creation of a powerful magic (*siddhi*) to hold back Java's dominance over Kambujadesa. This culminated years later on Mount Mahendra (Great Indra) far to the northwest beyond the Great Lake (Tonlé Sap in modern Cambodia). There he held a major Saivite ceremony

⁵² Long, *Voices*, chap. 1; Shastri, *Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 175–87; Woodward, “Aspects of Buddhism,” 222; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 286, 297, 311–12.

⁵³ Schweyer, “Royaumes du Pays Cam,” 18–22; Griffiths and Southworth, “Stèle d’Installation”; Griffiths, “Ancient Name Java”; Slaczka, “Depositing of the Embryo,” 435, 438–39n5, 441; Chemburkar and Kapoor, “Pasupata Sect.”

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, 177, 223, 225–26, 233, 236; Long, *Voices*, 41.

⁵⁵ Griffiths, “Ancient Name Java”; Griffiths and Southworth, “Stèle d’Installation”; Griffiths and Southworth, “Études du Corpus”; Sundberg, “Adversity for Sinhalese,” 358; Dumarçay, *Cambodian Architecture*, 45–47; Woodward, *Art and Architecture*, 97, 112–14; Aciri, “Once More,” 346; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 229, 293, 327.

performed by a foreign Brahman learned in *siddhi* to remove this threatened Javanese dominance. By this time, Jayavarman had built his own sacred power (*dhama*) and was consecrated by and initiated into Indra via the *devaraja* (divine dominion) cult, a protective supernatural power embodying the *siddhi* and safeguarding Kambujadesa from Java for all time.⁵⁶ He established himself at the existing site he called Hariharalaya (Abode of Harihara) in the Roluos River plain. Harihara represented the merger of Siva and Visnu, and in this situation it portrayed the merger of the lower Mekong of the Visnu cults and the middle Mekong with its cults to Siva.⁵⁷ Jayavarman did not establish Angkor as such (this would come later with his descendant Yasovarman I in 890 CE). From the first half of the ninth century, Jayavarman and his successors set themselves up as lords whose power, certainly free from the threat of Java, soon based at Angkor, reached north across the Dang Raek mountains into what is now northeast Thailand and west into the Dvaravati region, while also competing with aggressive regional lords in Panduranga and Kauthara on the east.⁵⁸

As the Sailendras of Mataram developed and extended their power locally and across the seas, the Meng lords of Nanzhao were doing the same in the northern mountains. During the second half of the eighth century, Nanzhao existed in tandem on the one hand with the Tibetans to the west and on the other with the Tang to the north, entitled by both and allying or competing with each as the situation allowed. From regional lords, the Meng achieved imperial status over the following century. Through these decades, Nanzhao first had to carve out their space between the Tibetans and the Tang. This they did as previously defeated local lords, backed by the Tibetans, attempted to regain their old territories. The Tang aided Nanzhao in destroying this effort and entitled the Nanzhao lord Prince of Yunnan. Based in the Dali plain, the Meng lords moved east where, allied with Tang interest groups, they struck down Cuan resistance to aggressive Tang initiatives and proceeded to set up their own power. From this time, after the anti-Tang An Lushan revolt in the 750s, the Meng lords turned against the Tang and proceeded to drive them out of the mountains. Now in league with the Tibetans who entitled the Meng

56 Griffiths, "Ancient Name Java"; Vickery, *Society, Economics*, passim, especially 387–402, 405–8; Thompson, *Engendering*, chap. 1; Woodward, "Practice and Belief," 253–61; Woodward, "Bianhong," 30; Dumarcay, *Cambodian Architecture*, 44–47; Bourdonneau, "Stèle de Sdok Kok," especially 124, 128, 136, 138, 140–42, 148, 153, 157–59; Sundberg, "Adversity for Sinhalese," 358–59; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 229, 302, 327; Chemburkar and Kapoor, "Pasupata Sect"; Hammer, "Invisible Kingdom," describes recent archaeological work that examines ruins on Mount Mahendra, presumably the ritual centre of Jayavarman II. Also, Kenneth R. Hall, personal communication (2017).

57 Lavy, "As in Heaven"; Pottier and Soutif, "Ancienitié de Hariharalaya."

58 Vickery, *Society, Economics*, 315–18, 382, 393–400, 405–8; Vickery, "Khmer Inscriptions"; Thompson, *Engendering*, 46, 54–56; Burgess, *Stories in Stone*; Lavy, "As in Heaven"; Pottier and Soutif, "Ancienitié de Hariharalaya"; Wolters, "Jayavarman II"; Chevance et al., "Sources"; Polkinghorne, "Decorative Lintels"; Schweyer, "Royaumes du Pays Cam," 22–23; Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 261 (map), 269–72; Kummu and Lustig, "Siem Reap River"; Lan, "Yasovarman Ier."

lord younger imperial brother and the eastern emperor; the latter (entitled locally Great Devil Lord) took control of territories farther to the east and the north. Moving south against local lords, the Meng made direct contact with the Pyu in the Irrawaddy valley.⁵⁹

By the late eighth century, supporting local lords defeated by Nanzhao, the Tibetans were increasingly aggressive towards the Meng, and the Nanzhao lords easily rejoined the Tang. During the 790s, with Tang support, the Nanzhao lord (now explicitly called the Nanzhao prince by the Chinese) attacked the Tibetans, driving out their influence in the north. To the south, in Charles Backus' terms, "The Pyu kingdom [sic] ... by now seems to have been firmly under the Nan-chao [Nanzhao] dominance."⁶⁰ Together, Nanzhao and the Pyu sent envoys to the Tang court. In the early ninth century, a weakened Tibetan court allowed the Meng to contest the Tang hold in the mountain world and to expand their power beyond this world. With a strong control over their own territory and a good knowledge of the powers around them, the Meng lords ("sophisticated and powerful," in Backus' phrase) developed their increasingly imperial position over the mountain valley chiefs utilizing both northern and southern (Sinic and Indic) patterns, including weaponry. From the north came classical Sinic literacy and from the south Indic tantric Buddhism.⁶¹ Now Maharajas and *cakravartin*, the Meng lords also claimed the title "lords of the Pyu" and insisted on equality in their dealings with the Tang and the Tibetans. From the 820s, keeping the Tang out of the mountains, Nanzhao built major constructions within its territory (especially Buddhist) and looked to take their power into the lowlands. This meant north into Sichuan province, southeast into the Annan Protectorate, and southwest into the Irrawaddy valley.⁶²

The river valleys of mainland Southeast Asia lay between the thriving Javanese power in the South Seas and the expansive Nanzhao attacks from the northern mountains. Threats of both imperial powers remained in local memories for centuries to come. The might of Nanzhao and its successor Dali (937–1253) hung over both the Irrawaddy and the Red river valleys. That of Java would remain in Khmer minds in the Mekong valley and be carried into the Chao Phraya with Angkor's expansion west. In these two centuries (650–850 CE), there was an apparent inability of local lords across the mainland to develop and expand their power in any lasting fashion (until the Khmer under Jayavarman II were able to do so). This inability exposed these localities to the southern and northern threats.

Strongly interconnected through trade with other parts of Eurasia in these centuries, particularly East and South India and South China, peoples of Southeast Asia found the seventh to ninth centuries a flourishing time. The Belitung wreck of the first half of the

⁵⁹ Backus, *Nan-chao Kingdom*, 195–96; Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung," 64–69; Bryson, *Goddess*, 26–31; Fan Cho, *Man Shu*.

⁶⁰ Backus, *Nan-chao Kingdom*, 98.

⁶¹ Backus, *Nan-chao Kingdom*, 102–57; Bryson, *Goddess*, 26, 34; Fan Cho, *Man Shu*.

⁶² Backus, *Nan-chao Kingdom*, 102–57; Aung-Thwin, *Mists of Ramanna*, 36–38; Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung," 66–67, 69–76; Bryson, *Goddess*, 34–37, 46, 82; Fan Cho, *Man Shu* 34–35, 38–46, 68, 90–94, 98–99; Schafer, *Vermilion Bird*, 31, 34, 49, 66–69; Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, chaps. 5–7; Lý Tế Xuyên, *Việt Điện U Linh Tập*; Kelley, "Local Narratives," 86–95.

ninth century shows the global connections seen in Southeast Asia—a Middle Eastern ship repaired in Southeast Asia carrying over 50,000 fine Chinese ceramics heading for Java.⁶³ These peoples had, in Wolters' words:

an awareness of universal values reflected in Sanskrit literature and of the example of Indian models for organizing knowledge. [Their] propensity for modernity [...] came from an outward-looking disposition encouraged by easy maritime communications. ... [Hence] the elite came to expect the continuous arrival of new and updated ideas with the stamp of universal standards of excellent behavior.⁶⁴

These were years of a unified and prosperous China under the Tang dynasty as major demands for eastern and western goods, as well as for local products, flowed back and forth across Southeast Asia. Chinese silk and ceramics, Indian cloth, Southeast Asian spices, all went through and contributed to prosperity and power across Southeast Asia. These were years of intense and thriving religious developments throughout Asia, and Southeast Asia was transformed religiously and politically, as well as economically, by these connections within the Buddhist and Hindu networks. As Kenneth R. Hall notes, commerce was not the only interest held by these networks, "multifaceted" as they were in economic, religious, social, and political directions.⁶⁵

Acknowledgements

In memory of Elizabeth (Betty) Montgomery Blair Gosling and Michael Vickery, with great thanks to Arlo Griffiths.

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⁶³ Miksic and Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia*, 236, 254, 285, 317–18.

⁶⁴ Wolters, *History, Culture*, 151.

⁶⁵ Hall, "Sthanu Ravi Plates."

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Chapter 4

OCEANIA

Glenn R. Summerhayes

Introduction

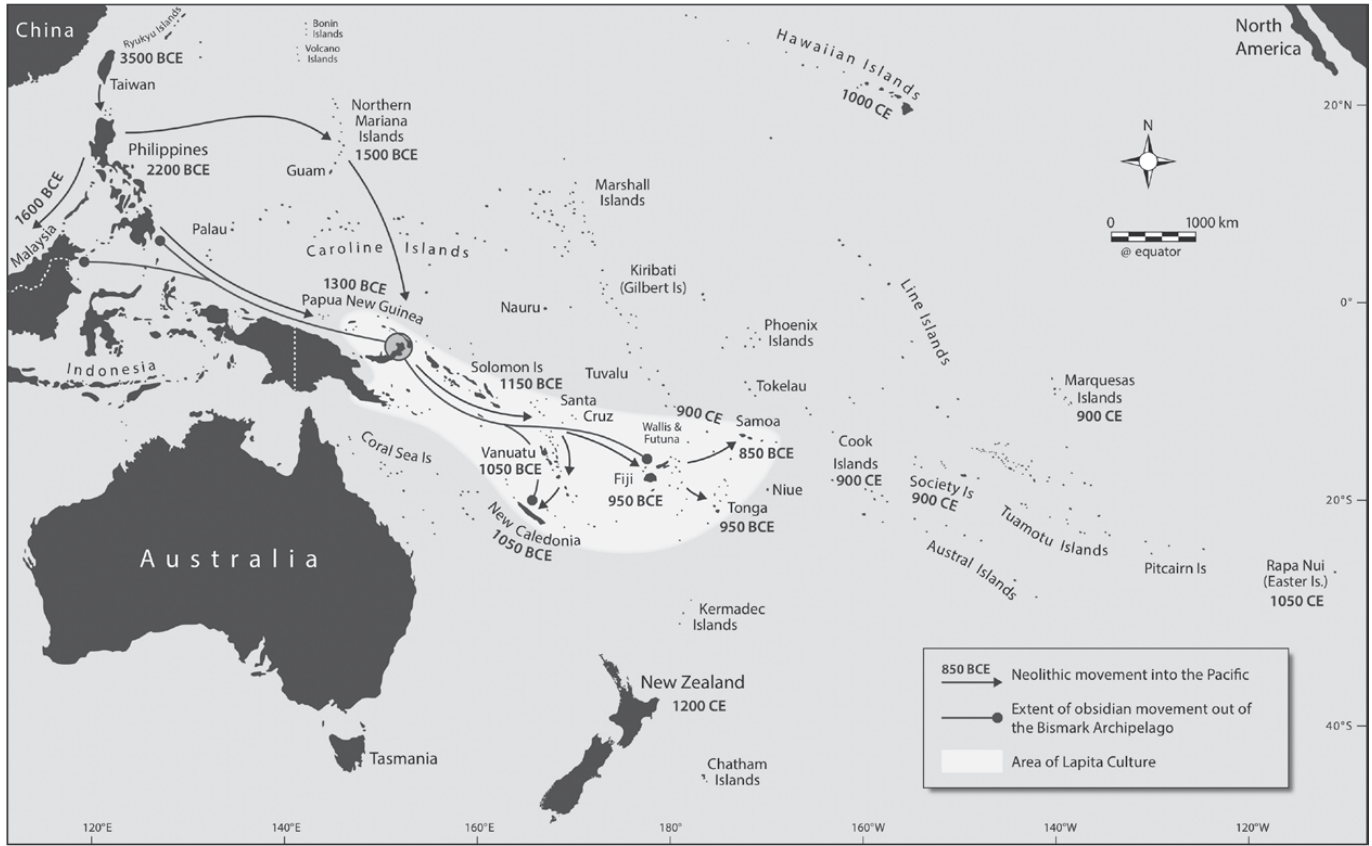
The Oceanic world makes up one-third of the earth's surface, and although it was one of the first regions where humans stepped foot (New Guinea), it was also one of the last regions where the journey of human colonization ended (New Zealand). The earliest occupation of New Guinea began at least 50,000 years ago as part of the spread of humanity out of Africa.¹ New Zealand was occupied less than 1,000 years ago as part of one of the last great movements of people in world history. To understand the past from 500 to 1000 CE, historians use archaeology and historical linguistics as no written record survives.² To explore this part of the world during this period, Oceania will be divided into three major geographic areas. The first region, Melanesia, is made up of the major island of New Guinea, the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago and the islands of the Solomon Chain, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji. The second region contains the islands known as Polynesia, which will be separated into West and East Polynesia in this chapter, to separate the regional differences. Lastly, to the north of both Melanesia and western Polynesia are the island chains known as Micronesia. [Map 5](#) sets out the islands for this region. Each will be examined at two points of time: 500 CE and 1000 CE.

The terms *Melanesia*, *Micronesia*, and *Polynesia* were originally defined in the early nineteenth century by the French explorer, Dumont d'Urville. Melanesia literally means "black islands." It was defined to describe the inhabitants of Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Fiji in contrast with those from Polynesia ("many islands") and Micronesia ("small islands"). Such racial observations based on skin colour were not only incorrect but also masked the great variety between the many peoples and their customs who lived in this region. Yet the terms are useful as explicit geographical regions on the planet and will be used as such in this paper. The continent of Australia which covers 7.7 million squared kilometres will not be covered in this chapter.³

1 Summerhayes, "Human Adaptation."

2 Since the available archaeological material of the first millennium CE is relatively scarce, it is often not possible to describe historical developments that are specific to the period 600–900. Therefore, this chapter covers the period 500–1000.

3 For updates covering Australia in this period, see Hiscock, *Archaeology*.



Map 5. The pre-modern oceanic world.
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Settlement History: A Summary

By 500 CE, the major islands of Oceania comprising New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, and the Solomon Islands chain, had been populated for over 50,000 years. At 500 CE the peoples making up these populations were mostly semi-sedentary stateless horticulturalists, although hunter-gatherer nomadic communities also existed. Islands to the east, however, such as Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa were colonized for the first time only 2,900 years ago by Neolithic populations bringing with them agriculture, Asian domesticated animals (pigs, dogs, and chickens), and sedentary village life.⁴ These people spoke an Austronesian language which originated in Asia and formed the ancestor of languages spoken in much of the Pacific today. These ancestral Oceanic societies were not egalitarian societies but ranked and formed the basis for later hierarchical social structures.⁵ The archaeological signature of these peoples is called Lapita. It is these populations that became the ancestors of present-day Polynesians. Yet, by 500 CE, the islands of East Polynesia were uninhabited. The colonization process here began by at least 900 CE with Tahiti (900 CE), Hawaii (1000 CE), Marquesas (900 CE), the Northern Cooks (900 CE), Easter Island (1050 CE) colonized. Islands of the southern Cooks, the Austral Islands, Pitcairn, and New Zealand were colonized later in time.⁶

To the north, the islands of western Micronesia were already populated by 500 CE by sedentary agricultural societies. Palau and the Marianas Islands were colonized probably from the Philippines, while those islands to the east (made up of Truk, Ponape, Kosrae, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands) were colonized from Melanesia to the south by 2,000 years ago, again by Austronesian speaking peoples.⁷ The smaller atolls of Kapingamarangi and Nukuro to the south of Ponape were colonized much later by Polynesians between 750 and 1250.

By 1000 CE, the Pacific was a place in transition. Most, though not all, islands had been colonized. Those newly colonized islands were showing signs of early environmental stress caused by exploitation and population increase. These islands and those to the north in Micronesia were showing signs of societies on their way to complex hierarchical social stratification, while those in the western Pacific, such as Papua New Guinea, are poorly known due to the lack of archaeological work. The rest of this chapter will now look at each region in more detail.

Melanesia

Mainland Papua New Guinea

500 CE

There has been relatively little archaeological research undertaken in New Guinea, and this is reflected in our ignorance of this region at 500 CE. Movements of people around

⁴ See Kirch, *Road of the Winds*.

⁵ Kirch, *Road of the Winds*, 105.

⁶ See Kirch, *Road of the Winds*, table 7.2, for a review of Polynesian colonization dates.

⁷ Rainbird, *Archaeology of Micronesia*.

the coastal region over the past few millennia are well documented. At the eastern tip of New Guinea, in the Vitiaz Strait region, there is evidence of pottery exchange between New Guinea and the island of New Britain. Type X pottery that was produced in mainland New Guinea is found in numerous sites on both the north and south coasts of New Britain. Also, from archaeological sites on the nearby coast of New Guinea pottery called Ancestral Sio ware was excavated from both the Tuam and Sio sites at this time.⁸ This production and movement pottery is the precursor to complex exchange networks linking these areas today such as that recorded by anthropologists linking mainland New Guinea with the island of New Britain.⁹ It has thus been demonstrated that the current maritime exchange networks have a long history.

The period around 500 CE also witnessed a movement of Austronesian speaking peoples westward along the north coast of New Guinea, and perhaps along its the south coast as well. This movement, although originating probably in western Polynesia as a back movement of peoples into New Guinea, can be seen in the archaeological assemblages along the southeast coast. From Wanigela in Collingwood Bay, a pedestaled bowl identical to earlier 3,000-year-old Lapita vessel forms discovered in the Lapita sites from the Bismarck Archipelago was found in a 500 CE context. Earlier Lapita occupation is not known from this region. The find suggests possible earlier Lapita occupation in this region. From the north coast of New Guinea there is evidence of coastal pottery-making communities on small offshore islands. One such island is Tumleo Island, near the town of Aitape. The presence of obsidian sourced from Lou Island and the Admiralty Islands indicates exchange networks across 300 kilometres of open sea. This is the first evidence for the movement of obsidian from the Admiralty Islands to the north coast of New Guinea.¹⁰ Obsidian sources are only found in a handful of locations in Papua New Guinea, and fewer locations in the Pacific. From Papua New Guinea major source areas are found in the Admiralty Islands, west New Britain, and Fergusson Island. Numerous objects found outside their source locations indicate their transference, mostly through trade and barter.¹¹

Groups of Austronesian speakers also colonized the south coast of New Guinea by 2900 BCE. Descendants of the original Lapita populations subsequently migrated along the south coast of Papua. The next evidence for occupation is at around the birth of Christ to 500 CE, when, as mentioned above, Austronesian-speaking peoples colonized the south coast from areas to the east, probably from areas in eastern Melanesia or western Polynesia. Three major archaeological sites over a 650-kilometre stretch of coastline provide evidence for this early settlement: Oposisi on Yule Island, Nebira near Port Moresby, and Mailu Island near Amazon Bay.¹² All three have pottery made with

8 Lilley, "Migration and Ethnicity."

9 Harding, *Voyagers*.

10 Summerhayes, "Rocky Road."

11 For a review, see Summerhayes, "Obsidian Network Patterns."

12 See Summerhayes and Allen, "Austronesian Colonisation"; Allen et al., "Early Papuan Pottery."

incised and shell-impressed decoration, some of which is red-slipped and similar to the earlier Lapita pottery from Bismarck Archipelago assemblages. This pottery is called Early Papuan Pottery (EPP) and lasts for 800 years at these sites. At each site, the pottery was made locally, although exchange is evident in the presence of a small amount of obsidian that has been sourced to Fergusson Island, over 150 kilometres east of Mailu.¹³ At each site, the obsidian was eventually replaced by locally available chert. The similarities in pottery over 800 years suggests cultural ties and interaction between these communities. After 800 years, this large community of culture changed and fragmented as evident in the divergence of local pottery sequences with the development of specialized trading systems as seen at European contact (see below). It should be noted that the appearance of Fergusson Island obsidian at these sites also confirms the continuing exchange relationships and interactions between these early communities. Fergusson obsidian was found in the Collingwood Bay sites as well.¹⁴

From the interior of the land mass of New Guinea, little is known. The highland area of New Guinea provides glimpses of this period through archaeological excavations in the Wahgi Valley of the western highlands and also pollen analyses from various highland valley systems.¹⁵ At 500 CE, there is evidence of a sustained programme of forest clearance under dry land, shifting cultivation in grassland environments as well as more intensive use of swampland for cultivation. Excavation of the Kuk swamp shows a grid-like drainage patterns suggesting the drainage of swamps. Wooden digging spades have been found in swampy environments dated to a few hundred years earlier. It has been argued that such exploitation of dry grasslands and wet site cultivation marks the beginning of agricultural intensification in the highlands, which allowed the development of sedentary villages.¹⁶ Pollen analyses shows that the forest areas were disappearing and grasslands expanding under human management. What was grown? It is known that *Australimusa* banana, sugar cane (*Saccharum officinarum*), other canes, tubers (*Pueraria lobata*), breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*), and yams were domesticated in New Guinea. Some aroids were also domesticated in New Guinea with separate domestications in Asia, such as taro (*Colocasia esculenta*, and *Cyrtosperma chamissonis*). It has been suggested that yams were grown in dryland cultivation, while taro was grown in swamps.¹⁷ It should be noted that not all the highland areas supported agriculture at this time. Pollen analyses from the valleys in the eastern highland region showed that they were still forests at 500 CE.

13 Summerhayes and Allen, "Austronesian Colonisation."

14 For a recent review of south-coast Papuan archaeology, See Skelly and David, *Long-Distance Maritime Trade*.

15 Golson et al., *Cultivation at Kuk Swamp*.

16 Golson et al., *Cultivation at Kuk Swamp*.

17 Golson et al., *Cultivation at Kuk Swamp*.

1000 CE

What little is known of Papua New Guinea around 1000 CE pertains only to a small portion of this large country, to a limited area of the highlands and a few coastal areas. Within the interior of New Guinea, this period marks the beginning of silviculture—that is, the human control or management of the forests. This is suggested by vegetation change in this agricultural highland area with an increase in *Casurina* (ironwood) at Kuk swamp.¹⁸ The isolation of these highland peoples can be seen in the distribution of stone axes. The quarrying, production, and exchange of stone axes is evident from the western highlands, but the fact that they were only distributed locally suggests that this area was isolated from both the northern and southern coastal areas.¹⁹ Such isolation was only broken with the appearance of European gold prospectors in the 1930s.

Along the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, and the islands of the Massim (a maritime area/archipelago that consists of the Trobriand Islands, Amphlett Islands, Goodenough Island, and Fergusson Island), a large exchange network was evident, much larger than the present-day “kula” exchange network made famous by the anthropologist Malinowski in the early twentieth century.²⁰ Pottery from Collingwood Bay on the southeast coast of mainland Papua New Guinea and Goodenough Island was exchanged across to the Amphlett and Trobriand Islands, and islands in between, with obsidian from Fergusson Island being sent back to mainland Papua. This large exchange network lasted another 500 years when it then retracted in size into separate systems, reflecting increasing regionalism.²¹ As has been noted above, and will be seen below, the retraction of exchange networks which once existed over larger geographical areas into smaller ones seen at European contact is a feature of this region.

As noted above, a similar change occurred along the south coast of Papua New Guinea. Between 1000 and 1200 CE, there is a change in the archaeological record along 800 kilometres of this coastline. During the first millennium CE, the coastal populations belonged to a single cultural group known as the EPP with a fair degree of social interaction, as is evident from similarities in the material culture, in particular pottery. At about 1000 CE, there is a disruption to the archaeological record with a change in pottery styles, other forms of material culture and site locations, all suggesting changes in economic and social dynamics within the populations along the coast. Afterward, the pottery assemblages along this coast become more heterogeneous with the emergence of localized styles. Obsidian is also no longer traded or exchanged along the south coast. All these developments suggest a break with what went before and the beginning of the more restricted exchange networks that we see today. On the north coast of New Guinea, Aitape continues to produce pottery and import obsidian from the Admiralty Islands, over 300 kilometres away across open water.²² Whether pottery was traded for obsidian,

18 Golson et al., *Cultivation at Kuk Swamp*.

19 See Summerhayes, “Island Melanesian Pasts.”

20 Ambrose et al., “Conus Shell Artifacts.”

21 Ambrose et al., “Conus Shell Artifacts.”

22 Golitko et al., “Obsidian Acquisition”; Terrell and Schechter, *Sepik Coast*.

or with mainland New Guinea as it is today, we do not know. Very little work has been undertaken along this whole coastline and we are indebted to the archaeologists from the Field Museum in Chicago for the little that we do know.

Bismarck Archipelago and Island Melanesia

500 CE

Massive volcanic eruptions on the Admiralty Islands, at 150 BCE, 1 CE and 350 CE seem to have obliterated all human life on the small obsidian islands of Lou. However, soon after the third eruption, obsidian is known to have been extracted for distribution along the north coast of New Guinea and to the east to New Ireland and north Solomons. At 500 CE, pottery producing settlements are seen at the Sasi site on Lou Island and on the Admiralty Islands. Pottery from this region was exchanged along with obsidian into New Ireland. The obsidian was fashioned into spear points. In New Ireland, sites of Fissoa and Lesu include Manus pottery and obsidian. Evidence for connections with Southeast Asia is seen in an earlier find of bronze in 150 BCE contexts from the Sasi site, on Lou Island, Admiralty Islands.²³

In New Britain, populations were probably obliterated along the north coast around Hoskins and Talasea due to massive eruptions around 200 CE and 600 CE. The eastern tip of New Britain witnessed a massive eruption at 600 CE, which formed the harbour at Rabaul. Such eruptions devastated all populations in the region.²⁴

Melanesia had already witnessed the disintegration and regionalization of the Pan Lapita cultural region of the previous period. Obsidian from the Admiralty Islands and west New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago was no longer exchanged eastward to Vanuatu and New Caledonia. New pot vessel forms had already replaced the remnants of the Lapita derived pottery traditions in Manus, Buka, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia. The appearance of incurved pots, a form rarely found in assemblages prior to 2,500 years ago (Lapita ware in the Bismarck Archipelago, Kone ware in New Caledonia, Erueti ware, and Arapus ware in Vanuatu), and its dominance over complex globular pots and jars, marks a change with what went before. These changes occurred simultaneously from Manus to Buka (Sohano ware) to Vanuatu (Mangaasi ware), and New Caledonia (Oundja and Naia), suggesting either a complete coincidence or some form of widespread interaction, whatever that may have been.²⁵ One explanation may be the “secondary migrations” from islands in Near Oceania to the Melanesian Islands of Remote Oceania. Any migrations from the Bismarck Archipelago were from peoples who would, as Matthew Spriggs has outlined, be “more mixed with the original Bismarck’s inhabitants than the previous Lapita spread, providing a more ‘Melanesian’ phenotype that is found in Vanuatu, New Caledonia and to a lesser extent in Fiji.”²⁶ Thus, although having the same founder populations as the islands of western Polynesia, the Melanesian Islands of

23 Ambrose, “From Very Old to New”; Kennedy, “Manus from the Beginning.”

24 Spriggs, *Island Melanesians*.

25 Kirch, *Road of the Winds*; Summerhayes, “Austronesian Colonisation”; Spriggs, *Island Melanesians*.

26 Spriggs, *Island Melanesians*, 159.

western remote Oceania had “genetic and cultural inputs from the west,” as is evident in Fiji, and applied equally to New Caledonia and Vanuatu.²⁷ Such a scenario has recently found support in DNA analysis.²⁸ Thus, by 500 CE, the peoples in these islands were the progeny of the original inhabitants of the Bismarck Archipelago and the Austronesian speakers who originally colonized the islands some 3,000 years ago.

The appearance of the new pottery industries at 500 CE marks the beginning of the exchange of pottery within Island Melanesia, although any movement was mostly localized. For instance, in the north Solomons, pottery-manufacturing centres on Buka Island at 500 CE were making Hangan ware, which was distributed to the south of Bougainville, and north to the Anir Islands, 60 kilometres off the southeast coast of New Ireland. Yet the importance of the exchange transactions is unknown as only small amounts of Hangan pottery were found outside of Buka, in contrast to later periods when the volume of pottery increased.

Evidence of population build-up and the expansion into new environments is also witnessed at this time. Within Fiji, this is evident with the increase of occupation sites. Compared with the previous period, the number of sites increase across Fiji, including the inland valleys, suggesting population increase. Increased human expansion is also soon in environmental degradation with massive inland burning of vegetation. From 500 CE, Fiji is part of what has been called the Navatu Phase and is identified by a change to paddle-impressed pottery. Interaction with island systems to the west such as Vanuatu is evidenced by obsidian sourced to the Bank Islands which had been exported into Fiji since 300 CE.²⁹

Within New Caledonia, regional differences are evidenced by separate pottery styles occurring in the north and south of the island.³⁰ It has been estimated that the population of New Caledonia was 50,000 with settlements expanding into all major valley systems. Here landscapes underwent extensive vegetation replacement leading to open grasslands. Evidence for defensive constructions is found on the island of Mare where stone monuments were constructed using coral blocks up to five tons each dating to the third century. It has been argued that such defensive monuments were built as a result of competition between groups arising out of population pressure leading to warfare.³¹

1000 CE

Pottery production in Manus continued during the second half of the first millennium, and was used in Mussau around the year 1000 CE (see below). Obsidian from Lou Island and nearby Pam Lin was also exploited and distributed to the north coast of New Guinea (see above) and also to the east. From Lou Island, mining for obsidian began by sometime before 1250 CE. The shafts dug for obsidian, some up to 17 metres in depth, were

27 Spriggs, *Island Melanesians*, 159.

28 Posth et al., “Language Continuity.”

29 Kirch, *Road of the Winds*, in particular chap. 5.

30 Sand et al., “Ceramic Sequence.”

31 Sand et al., “Ceramic Sequence.”

excavated to reach rich obsidian deep below. Furthermore, apart from only a small number of archaeological sites, little is known from around 1000 CE. From Mussau, pottery and obsidian from Manus were excavated in middens on both Boliu and Elunguai Islands, indicating trade with Manus. Finally, pig bone increases in these sites have been argued to indicate a change in the economic system towards competitive feasting.³²

In the north Solomon Islands, pottery from Buka Island continued to be produced at a number of production centres with the introduction of Malasang style of pottery by 1200 CE.³³ From New Britain and New Ireland in the north little is known. From the Anir Islands, Malasang pottery from Buka increases in number and is found along the whole coastline in contrast to the distribution of earlier Hangan style pottery. This increase in volume attests to the intensification of some form of trade network. Further south in the Solomon Islands, one midden site called Su'ena, located on Uki Island off the coast of San Cristobal, has an archaeological deposit that ends at 1150 CE. The site has no pottery, although there is plenty of chert adzes, fishing gear, and decorated Trochus shell armbands.³⁴

From Island Melanesia there is widespread evidence for increase in population numbers and the intensification of subsistence systems. From the island of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands there are indications of agricultural intensifications, with the development of irrigation systems. Changes to the landscape are also found in New Caledonia where around 1000 CE evidence for agricultural intensification is seen in the extensive modification of landscapes in terraces for taro and mounds for yams.³⁵ This occurs at the same time as the identification of social groupings, as is evidenced by the development of regional pottery styles: the Oundjo phase began in the north (pottery with incised, stamped, and relief decoration on globular pots), and the Nera phase in the south (spherical vessels lacking rims): each social grouping producing their own style of pottery for consumption. These changes have been argued to be the result of population increase as evident by agricultural intensification and also suggested by an increase in the occupation of inland valley systems.

In Vanuatu, the intensification of subsistence is also witnessed on Aneityum with the beginning of irrigation systems. Prior to 1000 CE, agriculture was mostly shifting cultivation (that is, gardens were relocated every couple of years to allow for soil enrichment). Yet the end results of a thousand years of this type of cultivation produced erosion and valley infilling.³⁶ These soils were used for an intensive, irrigated cultivation of taro. Similar practices are seen on Futuna Island as well. This shift in subsistence practice is thus widespread on many islands and has led some archaeologists to speculate that is part a Polynesian backwash into this region. Connections between Vanuatu and the Solomons is seen on the island of Tikopia. Here, pottery and obsidian from Banks Islands,

32 Kirch, *Road of the Winds*, 117.

33 See Wickler, *Prehistory of Buka*.

34 Walter and Green, *Su'ena*.

35 Sand, "New Caledonia's Prehistory."

36 See Spriggs, *Island Melanesians*.

northern Vanuatu, continue to be imported.³⁷ This island probably formed a node with the Reef/Santa Cruz Islands, where Bank Island obsidian is also evident. From the rest of Vanuatu, the evidence is much more limited. On the island of Malekula, a local pottery industry is known from 1000 CE onwards to the recent past. From central Vanuatu the latest evidence suggests that the pottery tradition called Mangaasi (characterized by incision and appliqué) stopped production by 800 CE, although similar pottery with appliqué continued in central Vanuatu until at least 1300 CE.³⁸

On Fiji, this period witnessed major changes as evident by the beginning or large-scale fortifications on most islands, including Lakeba and Vitu Levu. This includes the development of ring ditch fortifications. The Village of Vunda in Vitu Levu has given its name to the period that begins in 1100, when an abrupt change in the archaeological record is found. It is argued that connections with areas to the west are felt in Fiji with the presence of central Vanuatu-like pottery. This may indicate the movement of peoples into this area, or the beginning of trade with the west. Yet, whatever nature of this interaction, it occurs at the same time that fortifications appear across Fiji, which suggests some kind of social disruption.³⁹

Polynesia

Western Polynesia

500 CE

Western Polynesia at 500 CE also witnesses population increases with new settlements away from the coast into inland valleys. In American Samoa (Tutuila), early sites are coastal, such as the 'Aoa valley, and the adze quarry of Tatangamatau, while on nearby Manu'a the site of To'aga on the coast has evidence of occupation. In western Samoa, there is archaeological evidence of settlements from the coastal sites such as Mulifanua, up into the major valley systems as evident at Saso'a and Vailele on Upolu. On Tonga, 400 CE marks the beginning of what is called the Formative Period and is modelled on a number of archaeological sites: sixteen sites from Tongatapu, two from Ha'apai, and four on Niuatoputapu.⁴⁰ These also are made up of coastal and inland sites with settlements expanding compared with the previous period, which suggests population increase. There is no change in the non-ceramic component of the assemblages from this region. There is, however, evidence for a greater reliance on pigs and less of a reliance on sea resources. It has been argued that population growth led to competition for land, leading to the development of regional chiefdoms. The island groups of western Polynesia (Tonga and Samoa) undergo similar changes at similar times, suggesting close interactions.⁴¹

37 Spriggs et al., "Tikopia Obsidians."

38 Bedford, *Vanuatu Puzzle*.

39 Bellwood, *Man's Conquest*.

40 See Burley, "Tongan Archaeology."

41 Burley, "Tongan Archaeology."

1000 CE

The years 1000–1800 marks the beginning of monumental architecture, argued to be associated with the rise of complex chiefdoms, large populations, and intensification of food. David Burley calls this period the “Classical Tongan Chiefdom,” which ends with the arrival of Europeans.⁴² We do know from genealogical chronologies that the *Tu’i Tonga* genealogy began at this time. This is the title given to the sacred paramount chief, whose dynasty lasted over 800 years. The last *Tu’i Tonga* died in 1865. The emergence of a central chiefly polity may have arisen out of population growth as is evidenced by an increase in settlements in the inland sites and also the occupation of offshore islands. It is hypothesized that small chiefdoms would have come under control of this sacred paramount chief through competition of resources and warfare.⁴³ On the nearby islands of Futuna and Alofi, the period around 1000 CE also witnessed extensive taro pond fields and the beginning of the construction of fortifications. Also of note is the change in cooking practices evident by 1000 CE with pottery ceased to be made and the earth oven taking over as the cooking medium. Wooden bowls were also probably also used for storage.

Eastern Polynesia*500 CE*

No occupation.

1000 CE

The earliest evidence for occupation in Eastern Polynesia is much later in time. By 1000 CE, most islands, with the exception of New Zealand, were (or had been) occupied by the Polynesians: Hawaii; Tahiti, Austral Islands, Mangareva, Pitcairn Island, Henderson Island, the northern Cook Islands, and Easter Island. The first footsteps are seen in the Cook Islands and the Marquesas by 900–1050 CE, Hawaii by 1000 CE, Easter Island by 1050 CE, and New Zealand by 1200 CE.⁴⁴ These settlements were coastal, with some settlements based on raised platforms, as seen at Hane, Marquesas. Linguistic evidence suggests that the East Polynesian marae began at this time.⁴⁵ These early settlements of eastern Polynesia survived from a translocated economy with horticulture, pigs, dogs, and chickens introduced as a survival package for the successful colonization of the Pacific. As soon as these islands are colonized, they develop individual regional signatures as seen by the diversity in material culture such as in the use of fishing gear. This can be seen not only in the variety of forms of one-piece fish hooks but also in the selection of a variety of materials (bone and shell) in their manufacture. Diversification is seen also in adzes with the development of the

⁴² Burley “Tongan Archaeology.”

⁴³ See Carson, *Pacific Oceania*, in particular chap. 13.

⁴⁴ See Kirch, *Road of the Winds*, table 7.2.

⁴⁵ See Suggs, *Nuku Hiva*; Allen et al., “Early Papuan Pottery.”

tangs and a variety of cross-sections. Again, we are witnessing the development of the Early Eastern Polynesian Assemblage, which sets them apart from their mother communities.

Soon after these islands were colonized, environmental stress is evident. On Tahiti, hillside erosion resulted in valley infilling. On Easter island, occupation from the Anakena excavations starts from 1050 CE.⁴⁶ Deforestation probably began with the earliest occupations, as would have the overkill of nesting sea birds.⁴⁷ In the Marquesas, birds were extirpated in a short period.⁴⁸ Population increase is also evident on these small islands, with the expansion of settlements. Rapa was colonized soon after at 1050, with rapid population increase soon afterward. The earliest occupation here is near the coast (it was later to move into the interior).

Many of these islands are remarkably isolated. Hawaii, which was settled no later than 1000 CE, was in relative isolation, although there is evidence for some contact with Tahiti at 1300. Forest clearance is evident as soon as people arrived. Henderson and Pitcairn Islands, probably two of the most geographically isolated islands in the world, were colonized by 1100, yet abandoned within 500 years. On Henderson Island there is evidence of imports from the earliest occupation period: pitchstone and basalt from Pitcairn, and pearl shell Mangareva, no less than 400 kilometres away. Yet, although these islands were isolated, there is evidence for the long-distance transfer of goods.⁴⁹ From the Tangataau Rock shelter on Mangaia Island, sweet potato tuber was found in contexts dated to between 1100 CE and prior to the late fourteenth century.⁵⁰ The presence of sweet potato in the Cook Island assemblage at this date is well accepted by archaeologists and implies that Polynesians went to South America and returned with the sweet potato.⁵¹ Although recent research has argued that sweet potato could have originated within the Pacific itself,⁵² genetic evidence strongly supports its pre-Columbian introduction into the Pacific.⁵³ At the same time, fine grained basaltic adzes from American Samoa, 1,600 kilometres distant, and the importation of pearl shell from Aitutaki is testimony to the endurance of these long-distance interaction networks.

Micronesia

500 CE

Little is known about the societies that occupied these islands at 500 CE. We know that from Palau, terrace constructions began on the island of Babeldaob by 500 CE.

⁴⁶ See Kirch, *Road of the Winds*, 304.

⁴⁷ Steadman et al., "Early Faunal Assemblage."

⁴⁸ Steadman and Rollett, "Land Bird Extinction."

⁴⁹ Weisler, "Henderson Island."

⁵⁰ Hather and Kirch, "Prehistoric Sweet Potato"; Kirch, *Road of the Winds*, 210.

⁵¹ For a detailed debate on these early trans-Pacific connections, see Jones et al., *Polynesians in America*.

⁵² Munoz-Rodriguez et al., "Conflicting Phylogenies."

⁵³ Roullier et al., "Patterns of Diffusion."

What this terracing was used for is unknown, although theories range from terraced gardens to fortifications. From Kosrae and Ponape, early settlements were evident by pottery argued to be descended from Lapita communities to the south. Settlements at Nan Madol, Ponape, and Lelu, Kosrae, began by 500 CE, yet they did not take on the megalithic proportions that made these two sites famous. Stone structures were found, however, suggestive of social complexity, accompanied by massive changes in vegetation, resulting in the total transformation of the original vegetation.⁵⁴

1200 CE

By 1200, all of the atolls of eastern Micronesia were settled with early signs of stratified societies. On the Marianas, stone pillars with capstones called Latte started to be constructed. These constructions were probably house supports, and indicative of the residence of an elite or ruling class. In the western Caroline Archipelago, trade networks are identified between Palau and Yap. This is evident from archaeological excavations from Ngulu Atoll which lies between the two island groups. Exchange also occurs to the east as is evident by pottery made from Fais. Yapese pottery is also imported into Ulithi Atoll. Atolls to the east such as Lamotrek were also part of this trade network with pottery from both Palau and Yap found.

On Ponape, the beginning of chiefdoms and the rise of the Saudelaur Dynasty is evident by the beginning of the construction of the artificial islands at Nan Madol. Megalithic constructions took place a few hundred years later. New forms of material culture are also evident at this time, such as the appearance of new shell adzes *Terebra* and *Mitre* shell adzes. This suggests outside influences. On nearby Kosrae, population increase is evident at 1000 CE by the increase of archaeological sites. Structures being built also indicate the rise of a chiefly class. Yet such population growth on Micronesia was only evident on the larger islands. On small atolls such as Truk, a similar growth in population is not evident. To the south of Ponape and Kosrae lies Kapingamarangi which was first occupied by 1250 CE. This island was colonized not from Micronesia but by Polynesian populations who migrated from the south. This is part of what has been called the “Polynesian Outliers,” that is settlements found in the western Pacific that resulted from Polynesian immigration from the east to the west.⁵⁵

Conclusion

From 500 to 1000 CE the Pacific was a place of differing tempos of change and interaction. By 1000 CE the great land mass of New Zealand had yet to have humanity’s presence felt. When New Zealand was colonized by 1200 CE, it was by the Polynesians whose ancestors left the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago over 3,000 years ago and entered Remote Oceania for the first time, colonizing New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa by 850 BCE. The story in this chapter has looked at the state of society in the Pacific some

⁵⁴ See Rainbird, *Micronesia*.

⁵⁵ Rainbird, *Micronesia*.

1,500 years later in time with the development of complex exchange and interaction networks in New Guinea to Fiji and regional chiefdoms of the western Polynesian islands. By 1000 CE, they develop into complex chiefdoms and monumental architecture and at the same time we witness the rapid expansion into eastern Polynesian, and eventually the colonization of Eastern Island and much later New Zealand. Yet the movement of Pacific peoples did not end here, since Polynesian peoples moved back into the western Pacific, and indeed today we see similar movements of peoples across the whole globe.

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Chapter 5

JAPAN

Ross Bender

BETWEEN THE SEVENTH and ninth centuries, Japan experienced sudden and intense economic and cultural growth. Situated at the eastern terminus of the silk roads, the archipelago participated both actively and passively in a cosmopolitan East Asian sphere of influence. It received most directly innovations in art, architecture, law, and religion from its immediate neighbours in China and on the Korean Peninsula as well as influences from Central Asia and trade goods from as far away as western Asia. The disruption was so extreme that some have compared this period to that of the modern Meiji era (1868–1912), when Japan opened itself to Western stimuli and rapidly transformed itself into a modern state. To paraphrase Eric Havelock, in the late seventh and through the eighth centuries, the muse of Japan learned to write.¹ David Lurie in particular has emphasized the sudden burst of literacy in the late 600s CE, when orthography employing Chinese characters was first utilized on a broad scale.² It might well be said that in the eighth century the nation transitioned from orality to literacy, producing its very first written collections of mythology, history, and poetry. The elite of a nation that heretofore had no writing system of its own began dynamic experiments in writing both classical Chinese and using Chinese characters to express the native tongue.

These centuries were an era of tremendous political consolidation and concurrent disruption in East Asia, and Japan was not the only polity affected by sweeping change. In China, the Sui dynasty, founded in 581 CE, unified the empire after centuries of conflict among warring states. The successor Tang dynasty, established in 618, is recognized as a high point in Chinese political and cultural history, when the metropolis of Chang'an, the capital, was the largest city in the eighth-century world. The territorial reach of the Tang as it expanded to the east, west, and south, was the most extensive to date of any Chinese empire. Tang's cosmopolitan culture revived and refined classical Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist elements from earlier centuries of Han dynastic rule as well as the period of disunion. However, it also welcomed Arab, Indian, and Central Asian traders including Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and Nestorian Christians. The resulting pluralistic cultural dynamism radiated throughout northeast Asia as the kingdoms of Manchuria, Korea, and the Japanese archipelago acknowledged Tang's political and intellectual hegemony.

In 660, a coalition of Chinese and Silla troops destroyed the peninsular kingdom of Paekche, sending many of its elite into exile in Japan. Japan dispatched a huge armada with hundreds of ships and thousands of troops to aid the Paekche remnant at the Battle of Paekkong in 663. However, the Tang fleet almost completely destroyed the Japanese

1 Havelock, *Orality and Literacy*.

2 Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*.

expeditionary force, and in 668 Tang and Silla wiped out the northern Korean kingdom of Koguryō.³ The fear of China's growing power was a mighty impetus for Japan to begin to institute a system of Chinese-style laws and governance, while the influx of literate refugee Paekche nobility stimulated the development of a written language employing Chinese characters.

In fact, throughout the seventh century, a growing number of Japanese emissaries and students in Tang brought back knowledge of many aspects of Chinese culture that helped lay the foundation for change. The cultural and political power of Buddhism both on the continent and on the Korean Peninsula strongly influenced Japanese rulers to adopt the doctrines, art, architecture, and other technologies that comprised the so-called Buddhist cultural package.

Japan's primary capital during this period was the Chinese-style city of Nara, or Heijōkyō,⁴ founded in 710, and while the imperial court moved to Nagaoka in 784, the entire century is generally referred to as the Nara period. The city is often termed the nation's "first permanent capital," but this hackneyed image has been steadily undermined by the realization that in fact the designation is completely inaccurate. In the 740s, the great Buddhist emperor, Shōmu, attempted to found two new cities before returning to Nara. These moves were described by William Coaldrake as a reversion to the "peripatetic palace syndrome" and a "brief revival of the indigenous notion of a capital as impermanent."⁵ Joan Piggott discussed Shōmu's attempts to build capitals at Kuni and Shigaraki in terms of both factional struggles at court as well as religious pilgrimage, and recounted the sovereign's "frequent royal progresses around the extended core."⁶ William Wayne Farris's analysis of the archaeological record emphasized the portability of the imperial court and capital, detailing the remarkable way in which the major structures were packed up like monumental tents and transferred to new locations.⁷ Thus, the political history of eighth-century Japan is in some ways a tale of multiple cities. In all, nine primary, secondary, and tertiary imperial capital cities were in use at some point during this period. Some were rebuilt on the site of more ancient temporary imperial palaces. Some were erected on new foundations but were extremely short-lived, abandoned after a year or two. By the end of the century, the indigenous pattern of movable court centres had come to an end, and only one city, Kyoto, remained as the residence of the Japanese emperor and his court.

3 Paekche and Koguryō are the transcriptions in the traditional McCune–Reischauer system, used in this chapter. In the Revised Romanization (RR) system used in South Korea since 2000, Paekche = Baekje (RR); Koguryō = Goguryeo (RR); Paekgang = Baekgang (RR). Some Western historians refer to this battle as the battle of Paekson river.

4 Literally "Castle on the Plain." Kyō = capital. Different Chinese characters were used to designate the city in classical times. Both names, Nara and Heijō, seem to have had the sense of "flatness," emphasizing the plain or basin on which it stood, although another reading might be "Peaceful Capital."

5 Coaldrake, *City Planning*, 50–51.

6 Piggott, *Japanese Kingship*, 254–63.

7 Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 123–200.

This chapter will focus on imperial peregrination, the restless tendency of the Japanese sovereigns in the eighth century to found new political capitals and to move among these centres. It will explore both the external and internal stimuli for these movements and attempt to explain why, by the beginning of the ninth century, this pattern had come to an end. Internationally, the political environment in northeast Asia from the seventh to ninth centuries—the consolidation of dynastic power in China, the unification of the Korean Peninsula, the emergence of the state of Parhae,⁸ Japanese trade and diplomacy—greatly influenced the rapid development of the Japanese court. Internal factors, among them demographic growth, archaic traditions of rulership, succession disputes, and rebellions will also be shown to be responsible for the movement of the capitals.

An important disclaimer is in order at the beginning. In terms of the periodization of Japan's historical chronology, neither in Japan nor among Western historians are these centuries in any way considered to be the "Early Middle Ages." As Erik Hermans explains, this chapter was a contribution to a workshop on the eighth century at the Institute for Study of the Ancient World at New York University. But in the history of Japan this century is considered to be *kodai*, usually translated as "ancient." The Japanese medieval period is roughly the years 1200–1600, while 1600–1868 is now generally termed "early modern." Readers unfamiliar with this terminology are referred to *Japan Emerging: Premodern History to 1850*, in which the entire first section is devoted to explaining these "eras and appellations."⁹

Cosmopolitan Japan in the Northeast Asian Cultural Sphere

Although it is not known precisely when the Japanese islands were first peopled, the archipelago has a long prehistory of connectivity with the Asian mainland, the Korean Peninsula, and islands to the south and north. A Palaeolithic culture, the Initial Jōmon, can be dated to the tenth millennium BCE. Archaeologist Gina Barnes has identified two important historical developments in this series of connections, the first being the dissemination of what she calls the "Yayoi package," and the second being the era of the Yellow Sea interaction sphere.¹⁰ Briefly, the Neolithic Yayoi culture, including rice agriculture, accompanying technologies, dolmen burials, and pit-dwellings was disseminated from the southwestern Korean Peninsula beginning about 800 BCE. This package of technologies and cultural practices began to spread through the islands, mingling with and eventually displacing the hunter-gatherer cultures of the Jōmon. The Yellow Sea interaction sphere (400 BCE–300 CE) was a vigorous area of connectivity among Chinese mainland dynasties, Chinese colonies in the Manchurian basin and Korean Peninsula, southern Korean cultures and the Japanese islands. By the end of this period, the first giant tombs were being erected in Japan, containing bronze weapons, iron tools,

8 Parhae = Balhae (RR) or Bohai in Chinese transcription.

9 Friday, *Japan Emerging*, 3–53.

10 Barnes, *Rise of Civilization*, 270ff.; 309ff.

and horse trappings. Archaeologists designate this as the Kofun, or Old Tomb culture, and while historians for some time speculated that its advent was the result of an invasion of horse riders from the Korean Peninsula, a more commonly accepted hypothesis is that this culture was the result of diffusion. Glass beads found in these tombs give evidence of a lively trade between Japan and areas as far distant as India and western Asia from the second to seventh centuries, in a system of exchange both by land and by sea, sometimes characterized as the silk roads, including important maritime routes from western Asia to Korea and Japan.¹¹

During the seventh to ninth centuries, Japan lay at the eastern terminus of these great silk roads, immense trading networks that spanned Eurasia. During these years, traders and priests from as far away as central Asia and India visited the archipelago bringing music, religious artefacts, and technological knowledge. Already in the 600s, the islands had sent six embassies to Tang China, multiple ships carrying native trade goods but also scholars and Buddhist monks eager to learn from and import the high culture of the continent. Between 701 and 780 CE, Japan sent eight more embassies to the Tang and received two delegations from China in return.¹²

Members of the Paekche elite had emigrated to the islands even before the destruction of the Korean kingdom of Paekche in 660 CE, and afterward Japan received a massive influx of Paekche refugees, among them a large number of the aristocracy.¹³ This infusion spurred the birth of writing systems, as these immigrants, more familiar with the Chinese language, became advisers to the Japanese elite.¹⁴ Despite the enmity between Japan and Silla during the late seventh century, Silla exchanged frequent trade missions with the archipelago throughout the eighth century, providing medicines, perfumes, household goods, and exotic animals. Relations between the two were sometimes frosty, as on one occasion the Japanese emperor refused a court audience to the Silla envoy. For a brief time, Japan considered a military strike on the peninsula, although this never came to fruition.¹⁵

In 698 CE, the kingdom of Parhae was founded in the area of Manchuria, its rulers consisting of aristocrats from the defunct northern Korean kingdom of Koguryō as well as from Malgal tribes to the east. This Sinicized kingdom became not only a major trading partner but also a strategic ally, counterbalancing the alliance of Tang China and Silla. Between 700 and 800, Japan sent fifteen missions to Parhae and received twenty-two in return. Operating under the consensual diplomatic fiction that Japan was an empire and

11 Nakai and Shirataki, "Chemical Composition," 73, 92; Borell, "Glass Vessels," 43ff.

12 See chart in Tōno, *Kentōshi*, 202–5, for an overview of these embassies. Wang, *Islands of Immortals*, is an intensive study of Japan's interactions with China in this period; his Appendix I is a chronology of these relations from the first through to the ninth centuries. The first chapters of Verschuer, *Perilous Sea*, survey Japan's international trade in this era giving details of commodities traded.

13 Batten, "Foreign Threat," 208–14.

14 Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, 127–28.

15 See Tamura, *Shiragi to Nihon*, 319–24, for Silla–Japan relations in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Parhae its subject, the emperors honoured Parhae ambassadors with extraordinarily high court rank and benefited particularly from the kingdom's export of animal furs.¹⁶

The *Shōsōin*, an imperial storehouse constructed in the mid eighth century to house the possessions of the late Emperor Shōmu, contains a vast number of artefacts and medicines from China and the silk roads to the south and west. Spectacular examples are a lapis-lazuli cup from Sassanian Persia, a Chinese lute inset with mother of pearl, and hundreds of glass beads and game pieces as well as cut glass that came from as far away as Turkey.¹⁷ Overall, the material goods that reached the archipelago included fine fabric, perfumes, medicines, handicrafts, and books, while Japanese articles taken as tribute to China comprised silk and hemp cloth as well as agates and pearls.¹⁸

Although Buddhist influence had reached the islands via the Korean Peninsula for several centuries, it was the transmission of the religion in the form of a gift of Buddhist sculpture and texts from a Korean king to the Japanese sovereign in the mid sixth century that marks its formal introduction.¹⁹ Needless to say, the influence of this world religion on thought, art, and architecture was enormous. From the beginning onwards, the new doctrines were received as political ideology; native rulers understood the Buddhas depicted in the numerous, lengthy, and brilliant scriptures to be protectors of the realms where they were worshipped. The splendid temples first erected in Asuka, the area directly south of Nara, were engineering marvels, and the huge wooden pillars set on stone foundations, with enormous buildings supporting heavy ceramic roof tiles, transformed the native designs for both court buildings and the imperial seat of government, marking a transition from easily portable to more permanent structures.²⁰ Another transformative influence was the Chinese legal system. The *Ritsuryō*, penal and civil codes based on Tang law, were imported wholesale by Japan in the early 700s. While necessarily adapted to the native situation, these Chinese laws portended an overall Sinicization of native life, comprising rules for tax registers, road systems, and in particular a well-organized bureaucracy and aristocracy based on holdings of large tracts of land. With the emperor or empress regnant as the putative apex of the new legal system, the power of the centralized court grew spectacularly throughout the century.²¹

Since the introduction of wet-rice agriculture from the continent beginning in the first millennium BCE, the Japanese population had grown immensely. One attempt at

16 See Ueda, *Bokkaihou*, 88–91, for a table of all Parhae–Japan missions, and map on 229. See 123–35 for a description of the fur trade.

17 Nara National Museum, *64th Annual Exhibition*. The Imperial Household Agency's website details the categories of holdings by usage and by technique: <http://shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp/en-US>. See also Hu, "Global Medieval," for an overview. On the ancient written documents in the collection, see Sakaehara, *Shōsōin*; and Lowe, *Ritualized Writing*.

18 Verschuer, *Perilous Sea*, 21–22.

19 Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 19–20.

20 McCallum, *Four Great Temples*, analyses in detail, with copious illustrations of sites and temple layouts, the founding of Buddhist temples in the seventh century.

21 Bender, "Emperor, Aristocracy," 112–13. The reconstructed text of the *Ritsuryō* is edited by Inoue.

approximation speculates that the number of inhabitants grew from 100,000 in 1 CE to about 5 million by 700 CE.²² Farris has analysed the work of Japanese demographers on fragmentary early census registers and concluded that by mid eighth century the population was between 5.8 and 6.4 million. However, Farris also points out that the first smallpox epidemic that ravaged the islands between 735 and 737 CE significantly decreased the population and led to decline and stasis, so that by 950 CE it had stabilized to somewhere between 4.4 and 5.6 million.²³ As will be shown, this decline affected the court's ability to continuously construct new metropolises.

Coins, primarily copper, were first minted in 708 CE. In 760 and 765, the government minted new copper, silver, and gold coins in response to a growing debasement of the original currency caused by inflation and widespread counterfeiting.²⁴ Nevertheless, this period did not witness the birth of a true money economy, as taxes were still collected in rice and products in kind such as cloth, salt, and fish. The court established two large official markets in the southern part of Nara where the aristocracy could obtain goods transported from the provinces. In addition, a growing system of local markets was established nationwide by a network of lower-ranking officials operating along the major imperial highways that connected the sixty-odd provinces to the main commercial and imperial centre.²⁵

During this period, Japan experienced a transition from orality to literacy, at least among the elite aristocracy, the Buddhist priesthood, and the scribes who were employed by both. Two official national histories were compiled: the *Kojiki* in 712 CE and the *Nihon Shoki* (*Nihongi*) in 720. A compilation of poetry inscribed in classical Chinese, the *Kaifūsō*, was compiled in 751, and the enormous *Man'yōshū*, a compilation of poetry in Old Japanese, sometime after 759. The official chronicle *Shoku Nihongi* was presented to the imperial court in Kyoto in 797; it covers the period 697–791. *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū* employed Chinese characters both semantically and phonetically to record the native language, as did the imperial edicts known as *senmyō* inscribed in *Shoku Nihongi*. The bulk of the latter as well as *Nihongi* was inscribed in classical Chinese.²⁶

Changing the Capitals: The Traditional Movable Japanese Court

As described in *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, the Japanese court in antiquity had changed sites upon the accession of each new sovereign, and sometimes even during a sovereign's reign. Wooden buildings without stone foundations, the residences of the emperor and

²² Biraben, "Human Population," 13.

²³ Farris, *Daily Life*, 19–24. Farris, *Population, Disease, Land*, used the work of Japanese scholars to confirm William McNeill's thesis concerning the effect of epidemics on Japanese population. See McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 124–27. Older population estimates cited in Taeuber, *Population of Japan*, 14, are 3,694,331 for 823 CE, and 3,762,000 for 859–922 CE.

²⁴ Sakaehara, *Tenpyō no Jidai*, 79–102. See 82–83 for illustration of coins from the years 708–958.

²⁵ Farris, "Trade, Money."

²⁶ Seeley, *History of Writing*, 40–57. Vovin, *Old Japanese*, 15.

the high aristocracy were perishable and eminently transportable. Reasons given for the frequent relocations are the supposed pollution of a site after the death of a sovereign and also the matrilocality of the court, as crown princes resided in the maternal home which then became the new court centre upon accession to the throne. Farris provides a chart of thirteen different sites of primary and secondary capitals from 593 to 694 CE identified in the sources.²⁷ Many of these sites were used by multiple rulers, who sometimes returned to or rebuilt palaces in older locales. During this period, these sites were all in the general region known as Yamato, in the area of central Honshu now comprising the modern cities of Osaka, Kyoto, and the Nara Prefecture. Hence the ruling elites were known collectively as the Yamato court, which experienced a growing centralization of power during the 600s. The early, portable, palace buildings may have resembled the wooden architecture now standing at the Ise Shrine to the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu, with a horizontal ridge pole supported by crossbeams. The Ise Shrine is still moved to a new site within the shrine compound every twenty years, the old structure being dismantled and a new building constructed. Another example of distinctive native architecture is found at the Izumo Grand Shrine, an early political centre that eventually submitted to the Yamato court.

As noted above, the Asuka area south of Nara was the site of seventh-century Buddhist temples as well as palaces and the Fujiwara capital that precede Nara (see [Map 6](#)); the vague term “Wa Capital” is sometimes used to designate this region as a whole.²⁸ Two of the palace sites in the Asuka region providing significant archaeological information are Empress Suiko’s Toyura Palace (593–603) and Emperor Tenmu’s Kiyomihara Palace (672–694). Most of the seventh-century sovereigns inhabited multiple palaces: for example, Suiko the Toyura and Oharida palaces, and Tenmu the Okamoto and Kiyomihara palaces.²⁹ While little remains of these imperial court locations, there is an abundance of significant and dramatic historical remains in the area, such as the Ishibutai tumulus and the Takamatsuzuka tomb, both dated to the seventh century. The former is a megalithic construction thought to be the tomb of Soga no Umako, a powerful noble. The latter, designated a national treasure, has yielded colourful wall paintings of aristocrats in Korean garb as well as Chinese astronomical diagrams, including the four animals of the compass points: the Azure Dragon of the east; Vermilion Bird of the south; White Tiger of the west; and Black Tortoise of the north.³⁰

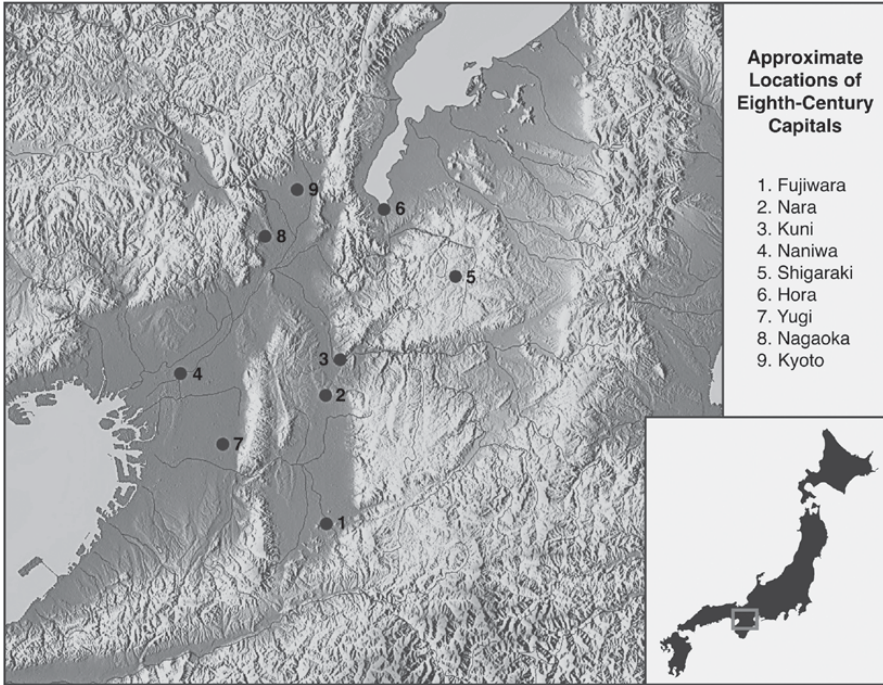
Archaeological evidence also exists for a system of roads running both north–south and east–west in the Asuka locality. The latter led to the port of Naniwa at what is now Osaka, and this was the site of another early capital. The first palace at Naniwa is marked by remains of postholes filled with ashes; posts were set directly in the ground without foundation stones. Scholars theorize that this may have been the site of Emperor

27 Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 146–47.

28 *Wa* was an old term for Japan.

29 For a detailed discussion of the pre-Nara palace sites, see Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 135–58.

30 The Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties website provides information on these sites in English.



Map 6. Approximate locations of eighth-century Japanese capitals.
© Ross Bender/Google Earth.

Kōtoku's Nagara Toyosaki Palace (645–653), or Tenmu's attempt at palace building from 679 to 686. The *Nihongi* notes that a fire destroyed the site in 686. Some scholars argue that the site was not only a palace but the first actual Japanese capital city, although the evidence is meagre, and such points as whether this was a first attempt at a Chinese-style administrative centre are still debated. At any rate, Emperor Shōmu returned to the site in 725 and rebuilt the palace.³¹

In 667, Emperor Tenji moved from Asuka to the Ōtsu palace on Lake Biwa near present-day Kyoto. Bruce Batten has suggested that the shift of sites may have been due to the Japanese court's fears of invasion by Silla and China after the 663 debacle at Paekson river.³² Very little archaeological evidence exists for this short-lived palace, abandoned in 672. The present-day Ōmi Shrine is located near the palace site and is dedicated to Tenji. The *Nihongi* records that a Chinese-style water clock was built in the reign of Tenji, and the shrine contains reconstructions of this clock as well as a clock

³¹ Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 136–41 and 173–75 summarizes the theories of Japanese and Western scholars.

³² Batten, *Foreign Threat*, 208–16, 216n99.

museum. Tenji's brother Tenmu moved the capital back to the Asuka region after the Jinshin War of 672.

Fujiwarakyō: The First Chinese-Style Capital in Japan

While Nara is sometimes described in English-language textbooks as the first Chinese-style permanent capital in Japan, the evidence is clear that in actuality Fujiwarakyō³³ in Asuka was the first Chinese-style imperial metropolis,³⁴ and also that Nara was by no means permanent. Archaeologists have identified major structures at the Asuka site, which served as Empress Jitō's capital from 694 to 710. Fujiwara was a city laid out in a grid pattern based on Chinese models from the Sui and Tang dynasties, and while scholars still debate the precise placement of the palace within the city, the remains of heavy tiled roofs and massive foundation stones for pillars indicate that Fujiwarakyō was intended as a permanent capital.³⁵ Within the Fujiwara capital, the palace compound was likely in the centre of the city, with Buddhist temples to the south. Miminashiyama on the north, Kaguyama to the east, and Unebiyama in the west, the three mountains famous in poetry of the time, surrounded the palace.³⁶ The Lower Way and Middle Way roads ran north and south through the city, with the tombs of Tenmu and Jitō now located to the south. In addition, several great Buddhist temples were located within the city or in the outskirts, the most prominent of which were the Asukadera, Kudara Ōdera, Kawadera, and Yakushiji. Several of these temples were moved and reconstructed in the Nara area. Donald McCallum has provided a definitive study of the archaeology and architecture of these seventh-century temples.³⁷

Paralleling the impetus to design Chinese metropolises was the aim to develop a Chinese-style legal system. Early attempts were made by Emperor Tenji in 662 and Emperor Tenmu in 681.³⁸ Although these law codes are not extant, they are thought to have been precursors of the *Ritsuryō*, the civil and penal codes of 701 and 718. While the originals of the latter no longer remain, they have been reconstructed based on extensive information in ninth-century documents.³⁹ The earliest codes sketched out a bureaucracy based on Tang dynasty models and included a great council of state with a first minister and great ministers of the left and right. At the apex of the bureaucracy was

33 Literally "Capital on the Wisteria Plain." The ancient Nakatomi family had been given the name Fujiwara in 669, but the clan had not yet achieved the political dominance that was to characterize it in later centuries.

34 Fuqua, "Centralization," 106.

35 Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 149–58, discusses the work of Kishi Toshio and other Japanese scholars.

36 The map in Yoshikawa, *Asuka no Miyako* (frontispiece), depicts the palace exactly in the centre of the putative capital grounds, closely bordered by the three mountains.

37 McCallum, *Four Great Temples*.

38 Fuqua, "Centralization," 106.

39 Bender, "Emperor, Aristocracy," 113. Inoue Mitsusada edited the standard edition of *Ritsuryō*. See Piggott, *Japanese Kingship*, 167–235 for a detailed analysis of these law codes. Wallace Johnson, *The Tang Code*, is a study and translation of the Tang codes.

the *Tennō*, or “Heavenly Sovereign,” usually translated as emperor or empress regnant. The laws embodied the notion that all land and property belonged to the sovereign, who then granted large parcels of rice fields and other lands to the high nobility, as well as far smaller plots to the ordinary peasant. The central state was to be financed by taxes from the entire realm, held together in a system of some sixty provinces connected by major arterial highways.⁴⁰

One of the most notable features of seventh- and eighth-century Japan was the reign of empresses in their own right. During a period of about 175 years, six women reigned as empress, interspersed with male sovereigns. This archaic pattern of female rulership has attracted major scholarly attention in recent years, with some scholars characterizing the phenomenon as a remnant of ancient female shamanistic charisma. Other theories are that the empresses were merely “placeholders,” acting as regents for crown princes, or alternatively that in fact female sovereigns functioned politically in much the same way as the emperors.⁴¹ The seventh century was in fact marked by female rulers in Korea and China. In Silla, Queen Seondeok ruled from 632 to 647 and was succeeded by her cousin, Queen Jindeok, who reigned until 654. Empress Wu Zetian, the widow of the Tang emperor, Gaozong, ruled in her own right from 690 to 705 as the head of the brief Zhou dynasty.⁴² The position of the empress as the chief consort of a male emperor in Japan was also of great importance, and three of the six ruling empresses began as such, taking over the supremacy after their partners’ deaths. As sovereign, the Empress Jitō was a major force in the establishment of Fujiwarakyo, and her younger sister by a different mother, Empress Genmei, was the founder of Heijōkyō.

In 708, Empress Genmei announced the need for a new capital city; the location was to be due north of Fujiwara. The new site was chosen by divination: “three mountains establish a bastion and the divining rods and the tortoise both follow Our desire.”⁴³ Although the reasoning behind the desire for a new capital is not entirely clear, it may be that the growth of Fujiwara was inhibited by its geographical position and a larger city seemed more appropriate to house the new bureaucracy established by the law codes. The site of the new city of Nara was approximately 30 kilometres north of Fujiwara on the northern extensions of the Lower and Middle Way highways. The Kizu river to the north connected the locale to Lake Biwa in the northeast and the old site of Naniwa on Osaka Bay to the west. When completed, the new metropolis comprised a rectangle roughly 4.3 kilometres east–west and 4.8 kilometres north–south, with an additional rectangular projection known as the “Outer Capital” on the east. This Outer Capital measured approximately 1.6 kilometres east–west and 2.1 kilometres north–south. The city

⁴⁰ Bender, “Emperor, Aristocracy,” 113.

⁴¹ Bender, “Emperor, Aristocracy,” 118. Ueda, *Kodai Nihon*, 13–37, provides a summary of these theories. See also Takinami, *Josei Tennō*.

⁴² Irie, *Kodai Tōajia*, provides a detailed treatment of each of the seventh-century female rulers in Japan, Silla, and China. In English, see Schultz et al., *Silla Annals*, 145ff. on the Silla queens; and Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao*, on Empress Wu.

⁴³ Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 159; *Shoku Nihongi*, Wadō 1.2.11.

may have had a population of as much as 100,000.⁴⁴ Nara was surrounded on three sides by mountains or hills that provided forest resources for building timber. Large buildings such as the imperial palace and great temples were constructed on firm foundations on Pleistocene terraces, while the residences of both the nobility and commoners were sited according to water availability. The Saho and Akishino rivers, small tributaries of the Yamato River to the south, flowed through the capital.⁴⁵

Emperor Shōmu's Peregrination: Nara, Naniwa, Kuni, Shigaraki

Nara, or Heijōkyō, was established and developed by Empress Genmei and her daughter Genshō, both of whose tombs are on the northern edge of the contemporary city. By 715, the imperial council hall and the main gate to the palace were complete.⁴⁶ In 724, the emperor Shōmu was enthroned; he was to reign until 749, when, having taken orders as a Buddhist monk, he abdicated in favour of his daughter Kōken. Already in 725 Shōmu directed that a new palace be constructed at Naniwa, which had burned in 686.⁴⁷ This was to function as a secondary or tertiary capital throughout the eighth century. In Nara, Shōmu commanded that the Great Eastern Temple, or Tōdaiji, be constructed to the east of the palace. This enormous structure, completed in 752, and still the largest wooden building in the world, served as the head sanctuary for a system of Buddhist provincial temples erected in each of the sixty-odd provinces throughout the realm. It also housed the giant statue of Vairocana (Japanese Rushana) Buddha, dedicated in 752.⁴⁸ Other major temples included Yakushiji, Gangōji, Hokkeji, and Saidaiji. Hokkeji, near the palace, was built on the site of the palace of Fujiwara no Fuhito, the father of Shōmu's Empress Kōmyō. Saidaiji was built by Empress Kōken as a western counterpart to Tōdaiji.

From 710 to 784, Heijōkyō was the primary capital. It was laid out on a chessboard grid with the palace centrally located in the north and the throne facing south to the city.⁴⁹ Overall, the design was inspired by Tang Chang'an. Like the Chinese capital, the palace enclosure was surrounded by a wall, and at the centre of the southern end lay the Vermilion Bird Gate. Running south from this gate lay the main boulevard, Vermilion Bird Avenue, that bisected the city. The court sited eastern and western official markets in the southern sector, and the throne and high nobility established many large Buddhist temples throughout Nara. Unlike Chang'an, the city was not enclosed by a wall. Another significant difference was that no Daoist temples were erected in Nara. Chang'an in the eighth century featured almost half as many Daoist as Buddhist establishments, and in addition several Zoroastrian and even one Nestorian Christian church.⁵⁰ Nara was a

⁴⁴ See Tsuboi and Tanaka, *City of Nara*, 5, for these measurements. See Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 161–65 for a discussion of the city's dimensions and population.

⁴⁵ Kawasumi, "Settlement Patterns," 49–56, including contour map on 46.

⁴⁶ Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 160.

⁴⁷ Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 173.

⁴⁸ Piggot, *Japanese Kingship*, 262–75. On Buddhist art at Tōdaiji see Mino, *Great Eastern Temple*.

⁴⁹ See map in Naoki, *Nara no Miyako*, frontispiece.

⁵⁰ See map in Lewis, *Cosmopolitan Empire*, 93.

predominately Buddhist city, with Shinto shrines on the outskirts. Kasuga Taisha, the family shrine of the Fujiwara, was located to the east of Tōdaiji and remains today the most famous Shinto shrine in Nara.⁵¹

In 740, the aristocrat Fujiwara no Hirotsugu raised a revolt in the southern island of Kyushu. Hirotsugu was the junior assistant governor-general of the Kyushu headquarters, the Dazaifu. The Kyushu headquarters functioned in some ways as a secondary capital, due to its strategic location near the sea channel to southern Korea. But it also served as a sort of honorary place of exile, far enough from the Yamato court to be less prestigious, and yet capable of performing a role as an important regional power base.⁵² In Hirotsugu's case, he used the Kyushu headquarters to rally an army of some 10,000, including local officials and Hayato tribesmen. This alarmed Emperor Shōmu sufficiently that he left Nara late in the year and travelled east towards the Ise Shrine that housed the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu, considered by the imperial court to be the ancestress of the human sovereigns. Shōmu's flight was thus in some sense a pilgrimage. After prayers in the direction of the shrine, Shōmu continued north towards Lake Biwa and then south along its eastern shore until arriving at the site of his new city, Kuni, by the end of the year. Remarkably enough, the trajectory of his moves followed closely the route taken by emperor Tenmu during the Jinshin war of 672 seventy years earlier.⁵³

Shōmu ordered that palace buildings, official markets, and aristocratic residences be transferred to the new site in 741. Entire buildings, including timbers and roof tiles, were moved and recycled at the new location, some dozen kilometres northeast of Nara on the Kizu river. After only three years, Shōmu moved again, this time to Shigaraki, another 20 kilometres to the northeast, and began construction on yet another government seat. It was in this location that the erection of a colossal statue of the Buddha began. However, after a disastrous fire that damaged the site, Shōmu returned to Heijōkyō in 745 and proceeded to erect the statue there. Although he made Heijōkyō the primary capital for the duration of his reign, Naniwa remained active as the secondary administrative centre. Kuni and Shigaraki were abandoned.⁵⁴ The gigantic statue of Vairocana Buddha was built in the Great Eastern Temple, or Tōdaiji, in Nara. Upon completion in 752, a huge festival involving 5,000 monks took place in its expansive grounds.⁵⁵

Shōmu's daughter Kōken ascended to the throne after his abdication in 749 and reigned until 758, when she in turn abdicated in favour of Emperor Junnin. She continued

51 Shinto has been termed the indigenous religion of Japan, with a reverence for spirits known as the *kami*, as opposed to the imported Buddhist doctrines. While there is still much debate surrounding the degree of indigeneity, Helen Hardacre, in the newest and most authoritative history in English, asserts that "From earliest times, the Japanese people have worshipped the Kami." See Hardacre, *Shinto*, 1–16, for an introduction to this history. Grapard, *Protocol*, is the major source in English for the Kasuga Shrine.

52 On the development of the Dazaifu see Batten, *Gateway*, 28–41, with maps on 34, 35, 37 and 39.

53 On Hirotsugu's revolt see Farris, *Heavenly Warriors*, 60–65. On Shōmu's flight and the foundation of Kuni, see Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 175–77.

54 Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 156–77.

55 Piggott, *Japanese Kingship*, 269–72.

to exercise a certain degree of power as retired empress, and then, in 764, after putting down a rebellion by the powerful courtier Fujiwara no Nakamaro and sending Junnin into exile, took the throne again as Empress Shōtoku, ruling until her death in 770. Nara was her primary capital, although she travelled frequently throughout the realm with a large entourage, stopping at temporary palaces set up along the way. In 760, a new northern capital was built at Hora in the northeast not far from the site of the old Ōtsu court; although a palace was erected and many aristocrats moved to Hora, it was abandoned after only about two years. Towards the very end of her reign, the empress spent a great deal of time in Kawachi province to the southwest of Heijōkyō; Kawachi was the ancestral home of her adviser, the powerful Buddhist monk Dōkyō. She designated a new capital in this area at Yugi, although she died before major construction could be undertaken; the site was abandoned.⁵⁶

Empress Kōken/Shōtoku is known as the “Last Empress,” since she was the last in a series of six women who ruled as empresses in their own right between the years 592 and 770.⁵⁷ Throughout her reign, she was exceedingly mobile. She delivered imperial edicts not only from the throne in the Heijō palace, but in Buddhist temples, the mansions of the high nobility, and in temporary palaces while on an imperial progress. The major Buddhist temples were sited within Heijōkyō, but the empress also visited lesser sanctuaries in the provinces, bestowing gifts and pronouncing decrees. For some months she resided in the splendid mansion of Fujiwara no Nakamaro while the Nara palace was undergoing repairs. After the suppression of Nakamaro’s revolt she undertook a massive imperial progress for approximately a whole month, escorted by cavalry and foot troops before and after. She stopped at temporary palaces erected for the occasion, many of them at the sites of palaces of earlier sovereigns, as well as at local Buddhist temples. At one stop she ordered that a market be opened, where the travelling elite could buy wares from the local merchants. Thus, her peregrinations combined pilgrimage and proclamation of imperial rule, as well as encouragement of commercial development.⁵⁸

Emperors Kōnin and Kanmu: Nagaokakyō and Heiankyō

Empress Shōtoku had taken holy orders as a Buddhist nun; during the last years of her reign she promoted the Buddhist priest Dōkyō to unprecedented civil and religious offices. In 769, an oracle was reported from the shrine of Hachiman in distant Kyushu that Dōkyō should be made emperor. The empress sent an envoy to the shrine who received a very different oracle, that only one of imperial blood should ascend to the throne. She died shortly thereafter, and the priest, who was not in fact of royal blood, was sent into distant exile.⁵⁹ Upon her death in 770 she left no heirs; this has sometimes

⁵⁶ Bender, *Edicts*, 19–47. See Takinami, *Saigo no Jotei*, for the biography of the Last Empress.

⁵⁷ Takinami, *Josei Tennō*, is a study of the ancient empresses.

⁵⁸ See Bender, “Performative Loci,” for accounts of the empress’s travels.

⁵⁹ Bender, “Hachiman Cult,” analyses the Hachiman oracles and the empress’s relationship with Dōkyō.

been characterized as the end of the Tenmu dynastic line, the emperor Tenmu having been her great-grandfather.⁶⁰ The throne was taken by the emperor Kōnin, a descendant of Emperor Tenji, Tenmu's older brother.

Kōnin was already about sixty years of age when he acceded, much older than previous sovereigns when they began their reigns. His wife, Princess Ikami, was a daughter of Emperor Shōmu, and they produced a son, Osabe, whom he named crown prince. As the grandson of Shōmu, Osabe was in the Tenmu lineage, and in 772 his enemies had him replaced in a dramatic series of events. Ikami was accused of using sorcery to kill her husband, and as a result Kōnin stripped her and Osabe of their imperial ranks, then made his son Yamabe the heir apparent. Yamabe's mother was a distant descendant of a Korean king.⁶¹

Shortly before his death in 781, Kōnin abdicated the throne in favour of Prince Yamabe, who was then enthroned as Emperor Kanmu. In 784, Kanmu moved the capital from Heijōkyō to Nagaokakyō, about 35 kilometres to the north. One reason for this move has been attributed to Kanmu's desire to move away from the powerful Buddhist temples in Nara and more particularly as a reaction to the political influence of the priest Dōkyō.⁶² Another reason that has been given is Kanmu's determination to finally found a permanent and eternal capital at a site where communications with the rest of Japan and Asia were superior.⁶³ But more recent theories have also read the move as a sign of the shift from the Tenmu "dynasty" to the Tenji line and a relocation to the power centre of Emperor Kanmu's mother. His mother was a descendant in the tenth generation of a king of the Korean kingdom of Paekche, and her family held lands to the north of Nara. Some have also highlighted the power in the new locations of Korean immigrants, both from Silla and Paekche, allied with the new emperor.⁶⁴ Other proximate causes were a series of disasters including the bizarre affair of Prince Sawara.

Before the new capital at Nagaoka could be completed, disastrous flooding, then drought and famine, plagued the site.⁶⁵ In addition one of the city's architects, Fujiwara no Tanetsugu, was assassinated in 785. Prince Sawara, a younger brother of Emperor Kanmu, and the heir presumptive, had opposed the move to Nagaoka, and was vaguely implicated in Tanetsugu's assassination, although the details were never ascertained. Sawara was exiled to Awaji Island and starved himself to death en route. The court then blamed his angry ghost for the disastrous events at Nagaoka, and even for the spirit possession of one of Kanmu's sons. The Tanetsugu assassination, the angry ghost of Prince Sawara, and the series of calamities helped impel Kanmu to pick up stakes again in 794. This time he founded the new city of Heiankyō, "Capital of Peace and Tranquility," a few kilometres east of Nagaoka.⁶⁶ Heiankyō, or Kyoto, was to remain the imperial

60 Ooms, *Imperial Politics*, characterizes the years 650–800 as the "Tenmu Dynasty."

61 Van Goethem, *Nagaoka*, 11–30.

62 Groner, *Saichō*, 9–14.

63 Stavros, *Kyoto*, 1–7.

64 Toby, "Why Leave Nara," 342; Como, *Weaving and Binding*, 1–24.

65 Van Goethem, *Nagaoka*, 237–52.

66 Van Goethem, *Nagaoka*, 115–28; Kimoto, *Fujiwara no Tanetsugu*, 195–270.

capital until 1869, despite sporadic attempts to shift the site during the intervening millennium, which often experienced warfare and chaos.

Conclusions

Japan's numerous eighth-century capitals, many of them extremely short-lived, testify to the restlessness of the imperial court. Both external and internal factors can be adduced to explain the peregrination of the monarchs. The seventh to ninth centuries were a time of tremendous disruption and consolidation of power in East Asia and Japan was far from the only polity with multiple political centres. As noted above, the massive influence of Sui and Tang affected Japan in a great number of ways. First, China's military threat to Japan's Korean ally Paekche resulted in the destruction of that Korean kingdom and an influx of Paekche nobility who stimulated the development of the Japanese written language using Chinese characters. The fear of China and its Korean ally Silla were apparently responsible for the movement from the Asuka region to the late seventh-century capital of Ōtsu. Second, Japanese emissaries to China during the seventh century brought back knowledge of the Chinese legal system which Japan gradually adopted and adapted to its situation. Third, the cultural and political power of Buddhism both on the continent and on the peninsula strongly influenced Japanese rulers to adopt the doctrines, art, architecture, and other technologies that comprised the Buddhist package.

To some extent the multiple official centres were imitations of the Chinese and Korean patterns of multiple capitals. The areas of Chang'an and Luoyang had been the site of royal cities since the early first millennium BCE. Established by the nomadic Tuoba clan of the Xianbei, the Northern Wei dynasty in China flourishing from 386 to 535 CE had three capital cities during this period. Strikingly, the first of them was named Pingcheng, employing the same Chinese characters as Heijō in Japan. Emperor Wen of the Sui founded Daxing near the area of Han Chang'an, and Emperor Yang re-established the eastern capital of Luoyang. Emperor Gaozu of the Tang changed the name of Daxing to Chang'an.⁶⁷ Parhae featured as many as five capital cities, as rulers periodically established new centres from 698 to 793.⁶⁸ Unified Silla likewise had five capitals during its existence as a state between 668 and 935.⁶⁹

Buddhism had been diffused from China and the Korean Peninsula to the archipelago from early times, and, according to Japanese records, the King of Paekche sent scriptures and an image of the Buddha to Emperor Kinmei in the mid sixth century. The construction of massive Buddhist temples during the seventh and eighth centuries, employing gigantic wooden pillars on stone foundations, was one inspiration for a new style of civic architecture. Hitherto the courts had comprised wooden palaces around which were grouped council halls and homes of the aristocracy. These centres were moved upon the death of an emperor to a new site; sometimes the palaces were moved even

67 Ogasawara, *Shōmu Tennō*, 232–39.

68 Ueda, *Bokkaikou*, see map, 24.

69 McBride, *State and Society*, see map, 19.

during the reign of a single sovereign. While the novel technologies for erecting Buddhist temples made possible more permanent capital cities, these techniques were somewhat paradoxically employed to move and re-erect temples and palaces in new locations fairly rapidly.

Similarly, the immensely prestigious Tang legal system was adopted wholesale by the early eighth century, although from the beginning adaptations were made to the Japanese situation. Implementation of the Tang codes hastened the centralization of power in the Yamato court, a process that had been under way for some centuries. Tang-style penal and civil codes were drafted in the late seventh century, although they are no longer extant. Fujiwarakyo was the first attempt at a centralized Chinese-style permanent capital in Japan, its layout based on Sui and Tang models, and surrounded by Buddhist temples. Although it lasted a mere sixteen years, the Fujiwara capital served as a template for capital building, one that was replicated in Nara, to a limited extent in Kuni, and then in Nagaoka and Heian.

Another external factor was trade between the islands and the continent, and also with the new kingdom of Parhae and the peninsular kingdom of Silla. Parhae, in addition to being a major trading partner, became a political ally in counterpoint to the Tang–Silla alliance. It was via Parhae that the emperor received news of the great disruption on the continent, the An Lushan rebellion beginning in 756. Parhae also served as a protector and waypoint for diplomats travelling to China. China trained Japanese priests and scholars and transmitted cosmopolitan overtures from the distant west. Chinese Buddhist priests as well as emissaries from as far away as Central Asia and India visited Japan.

Finally, the introduction of smallpox in the great epidemic of 735–737 was another sort of import. In Japan itself the population had been rising steadily since the introduction of wet-rice agriculture during the first millennium BCE. This demographic growth proved strong enough, even in the face of the introduction of smallpox and subsequent epidemics, to provide a material basis for the growth of internal trade, the construction of vast temple complexes, and new metropolises. The first smallpox epidemic killed off some of the high nobility, and in its wake a rebellion motivated Emperor Shōmu to move the capital. The native tradition of portable administrative centres was in evidence throughout the eighth century and was only halted after the establishment of Kyoto in 794. Population decline in the ninth century helped to account for an end to the imperial capital shifting that was the Japanese heritage.

Within Japan numerous rebellions and succession disputes were further spurs to efforts to relocate the imperial court. Thus, in addition to the relatively permanent capital at Nara from 710 to 784, new secondary capitals were founded at Naniwa, Kuni, Shigaraki, Hora, and Yugi. The rebellion of Hirotsugu in 740 impelled Emperor Shōmu to flee Nara and found Kuni and Shigaraki to the northeast. The Hora capital, established in 760, was likely constructed due to the temporary hegemony of another powerful aristocrat, Fujiwara no Nakamaro, whose family had a power base in the area, consisting both of hereditary landholdings and the possession of contemporary bureaucratic offices. Yugi was founded by the empress Shōtoku, who formally re-ascended the throne in 765 after putting down Nakamaro's rebellion. Although Naniwa developed as a long-standing

secondary administrative centre, none of the others lasted more than three years. The Kyushu government headquarters, or Dazaifu, in southern Japan near the sea road to the Korean Peninsula while never an official capital functioned as an important regional administrative centre.

After Shōtoku's death in 770, a new sub-dynastic line was begun by the emperor Kōnin, who was already in his sixties when he ascended the throne. He ruled until 781 as a sort of transitional ruler; his son Kanmu took the throne and soon moved the capital to Nagaoka, in an area where his maternal relatives were powerful. Nagaoka proved to be another short-lived capital, and after a series of disasters Kanmu transferred the capital to nearby Heiankyō in 794. This metropolis, also known as Kyoto, was to be the locus of imperial authority until the Meiji Restoration of 1868; the emperor was moved to Tokyo by the new government in the following year. The long-ingrained Japanese tradition of shifting capitals might well have continued even beyond the 800s, but the strong likelihood is that economic and demographic decline and stasis, in part due to the introduction of epidemic disease from the Korean Peninsula, helped to put a halt to the ancient pattern.

One economic factor was the forty-year-long series of wars against the indigenous Emishi people in northeastern Japan. The Emishi, written with Chinese graphs meaning "barbarians," occupied roughly the northeastern third of the main island of Honshu at the time of the founding of Nara. Although some have speculated that these were the same people later known as the Ainu, there is no clear evidence that they were ethnically different from the people in central Japan. While there were some language differences, and the Emishi economy depended more on hunting and gathering, Karl Friday summarizes the conclusions of Japanese scholars that the term "barbarian" was a political designation for those in the northeast outside the main Yamato polity, rather than an ethnic label.⁷⁰

Although efforts to bring the Emishi under the control of the Nara court proceeded sporadically throughout the eighth century, an imperial decree in 774 announced a major policy shift, a campaign to completely subdue the Emishi.⁷¹ Over the next decades, court-led expeditionary armies conducted repeated invasions of the northeast, many of which were disastrous. Finally, in 811, the court in Kyoto declared the region pacified, although Friday comments that "This new state of affairs was more a change of policy and outlook than of reality."⁷² As Friday's analysis makes clear, the wars had wasted resources and manpower while accomplishing little, and he contends that the end of the campaigns marked a turning point in a state structure which was undergoing profound changes in administration, tax collection, and military institutions that were harbingers of further decline in central authority into the medieval period.⁷³

70 Friday, "Beyond the Pale," 1–5.

71 Friday, "Beyond the Pale," 10–11. Friday's article is a detailed narrative and analysis of the court's relations with the Emishi throughout the eighth and into the early ninth centuries.

72 Friday, "Beyond the Pale," 23.

73 Friday, "Beyond the Pale," 23–24.

The actual material losses by the court in the Emishi wars are hard to quantify but were certainly another of the factors leading to the end of the attempts to found new capital cities. In demographic terms, by the mid tenth century, the Japanese population had fallen to roughly 5 million, from an eighth-century peak of as much as 6.4 million. As Wayne Farris has concluded in summary, "Material and demographic constraints had put an end to imperial dreams of constructing new Chinese-style capitals."⁷⁴ While the above factors were significant in the short run, the reasons for the duration of Kyoto as imperial capital over the next millennium are beyond the scope of this chapter. After the foundation of the first military or shogunal capital in Kamakura by the end of the twelfth century, and the establishment of Edo (present-day Tokyo) as the headquarters of the Shogun in the early seventeenth century, Kyoto nevertheless remained the imperial capital. While the victory of the military rulers was complete, they apparently found it useful to preserve the emperor's throne and the imperial line as sources of legitimacy.

The move to Kyoto also coincided with the end of the period of archaic rule by empresses in their own right. A misogynistic and scandalous tradition later grew up alleging that the Last Empress and the priest Dōkyō had been lovers.⁷⁵ While the true nature of their relationship is unclear from the contemporary annals,⁷⁶ it is a fact that Empress Shōtoku was the last of the six ancient empresses in their own right; only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the military government of the Shogun had supplanted imperial rule, were two women to become titular rulers. There is no convincing explanation as to the end of female rule, although some have speculated that it was due to the increasing strength of patriarchal Confucian political thought in Japan.⁷⁷ Perhaps more significant is that Shōtoku had no offspring and refused to name a successor during her lifetime.

Recent Japanese scholarship on the capitals, which is massive, has focused on the enormous amount of archaeological material dug up during the twentieth century. In addition to discovering the layouts and boundaries of the cities and palaces, archaeologists have found ample evidence of great mansions that once existed in Heijōkyō. Most spectacular have been the finds of *mokkan*, wooden tablets now numbering in the hundreds of thousands that provide extraordinary if very fragmentary evidence of daily life, trade, and economy throughout the eighth century. Many of these documents demonstrate very specifically the types of tax goods received in the capital, as well as hints at the administration of some of the great aristocratic mansions in Nara. As these tablets are collated and analysed, new light will continue to emerge to explain in greater detail and sophistication the fundamental reasons for the economic and political developments of the eighth century.⁷⁸

74 Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 185.

75 The first appearance is in the *Nihon Ryōiki*, a collection of tales from the early ninth century. See Watson, *Miraculous Events*, 190–91.

76 Bender, "Hachiman Cult," 139.

77 Piggott, "Female Sovereign."

78 For an introduction, see Mokkan Gakkai, *Mokkan kara Kodai*. In English see Piggott, "Mokkan," and Farris, *Sacred Texts*, 201–32.

Japan during the seventh to ninth centuries was the eastern terminus of the silk roads, participating both passively and actively in this grand cosmopolitan epoch. The tremendous significance of this foundational era in Japan has yet to be fully acknowledged or recognized. Although the Nara period is relatively understudied by Western scholars, and has certainly received less attention than the central Asian silk roads or the western reaches of these dynamic thoroughfares, a recently published volume centred on medieval China explored interactions between the archipelago and its continental and peninsular partners.⁷⁹ Essays in the collection featured an eminent Chinese Buddhist priest who emigrated to Japan, the influence of Chinese law and literature, poetry composed by Japanese envoys to Silla, and a prominent Japanese ambassador to the Tang court. The time is ripe for a renewed scholarly emphasis not only on Japan's own eighth century but on its meaning within the global context, including its dealings with near neighbours but also its connections along the far reaches of the silk road to western Asia and Europe.

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⁷⁹ Wong and Heldt, *China and Beyond*.

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Chapter 6

KOREA

Richard D. McBride II

THE KINGDOM OF Silla (ca. 300–935 CE) was the most important of the early Korean states that vied for supremacy in the Early Middle Ages because: it conquered the other polities on the peninsula through an alliance with Tang China (618–907 CE) in the mid seventh century, it enjoyed vigorous diplomatic and cultural relations with Tang from the seventh to the early tenth century, and its literary and epigraphic remains are more robust than other early Korean states. For much of the twentieth century, research on early Korea, including Silla, was divided between competing approaches: the first half of the century was dominated by Japanese scholars who executed their studies beginning during the colonial period. Some scholars advanced politically driven interpretations of early Korean history and assertions of Korean backwardness or slavish emulation of China to justify Japanese colonial acquisitions and its forceful approach to modernization policies. In the second half of the twentieth century, nationalistic Korean scholars responded by emphasizing a rhetoric Korean “uniqueness” in government and cultural practices. Both of these approaches have ultimately obscured our understanding of Silla history. Scholars adhering to an empirical approach to the study of early Korean history have sought a middle path emphasizing source-critical analysis. Conventional Western scholarship on Silla has generally followed empirical scholarship, but it also evinces some uncritical influences inherited from the other approaches. The Silla kingdom, particularly during the “Unified Silla period” (ca. 668–935 CE),¹ is typically described as an East Asian state that merely copied or mimicked its larger neighbour Tang China. Support for this view typically has been found in Silla’s frequent tribute-bearing missions, loyal military support, and apparent emulation of Tang institutions during the seventh, eighth,

¹ The term “Unified Silla” is a product of modernity and hinges on the idea that Silla united the other two competing states on the Korean peninsula during the seventh century, Koguryō and Paekche, becoming the first Korean state to rule the entire peninsula. In recent decades, Korean scholars have increasingly challenged the concept of “Unified Silla” because Silla’s “unification” was not lasting—a later Paekche state (ca. 892–936) and later Koguryō state (ca. 901–918) emerged in the late ninth and early tenth centuries—and it ignores the Parhae state (Bohai, 698–926 CE) that controlled much of Koguryō’s former domain. Some scholars prefer to speak of a Korean northern and southern dynasties period, but the extent to which Parhae was “Korean” or “Malgal” (Chinese: Mohe) is a greatly disputed topic. The Koryō period historian Kim Pusik (1075–1151 CE), the lead editor and compiler of the *Samguk sagi* (*History of the Three Kingdoms*), advanced a different periodization of Silla history: he wrote of middle Silla (654–780 CE) and late Silla (780–935 CE) periods. Because Silla was a conquest dynasty, rising to dominance on the peninsula due to a complex tribute relationship with Tang China, I prefer to use the concepts of middle and late Silla as heuristic devices to explain the periodization of Silla history. See McBride, *State and Society*, 3–4.

and ninth centuries. Some scholars have gone so far as to speculate that the Silla capital, present-day Kyōngju in southeastern Korea, was—like Nara (Heijōkyō) and Kyōtō (Heiankyō) in Japan—arrayed in chequerboard shape and modelled on the Tang capital Chang’an.² Korean scholars, both nationalistic and empirical, on the other hand, have emphasized internal developments that gave rise to the autocratic power or despotism of the Silla royalty during the middle Silla period (654–780 CE). In other words, Silla kings dominated the hereditary nobility in the political sphere by introducing selected Tang-style institutional reforms. My approach to Silla history is well within the empirical camp, and it challenges conventionally accepted interpretations when supporting evidence for those positions is lacking and when other more fruitful explanations can be advanced. This chapter will articulate how Silla’s growing global connections with Tang, primarily, but also with other regions of Eurasia, affected socio-economic, political, and cultural developments.

Several of these transformative developments may be expressed under the following three headings: (1) Silla kings attempted to curb the power of the hereditary nobility and strengthen autocratic rule through the adoption and adaptation of Sinitic approaches to governance and land tenure but were ultimately unsuccessful in breaking the power of the capital-based nobles. (2) Silla became an active participant in regional trade with Tang China and Nara (710–794 CE) and Heian Japan (794–1185 CE). Silla’s position at the centre of trade in the Yellow Sea region gradually enabled it to play a significant role in promoting trade by the middle of the ninth century. Dissatisfaction with the limited opportunities available to lesser elites in Silla’s highly stratified social order led to an increasing number of Silla natives studying in Tang. In addition, some Silla commoners sought their fortune in China in various occupations, such as merchants and soldiers. (3) The *hwarang* education system was bolstered and transformed through the full-scale adoption of Chinese Confucian learning and the establishment of the state academy.

The seventh and eighth centuries are traditionally considered Korea’s “Golden Age,” because this period produced some of Korea’s greatest Buddhist thinkers and artistic monuments. Prominent individuals from this period include the eminent Buddhist scholar Wōnhyo (617–686 CE), whose many commentaries were influential and quoted extensively by colleagues in contemporary China and Japan; the monk Ŭisang (625–702 CE), whose *Seal-Diagram Symbolizing the Dharma Realm of the One Vehicle of the Avataṃsaka* (*Hwaōm ilsūng pōpkye to*) encapsulated the core teachings of the Huayan/Hwaōm (Flower Garland) tradition, which views all phenomena in existence in a beautiful and blossoming yet complex web of complete interfusion and interconnection with all other phenomena, and arrayed them in a diagrammatic form enabling their extensive use in practice and edification;³ and the Confucian scholar Sōl Ch’ong (ca. 660–730 CE), who reportedly translated *The Book of Documents* (*Shu jing*) from Chinese into the Silla vernacular by codifying the system of transcribing Korean words using Sinitic logographs (“clerical readings”). From the standpoint of art, architecture,

2 See, for instance, Ebrey et al., *Pre-modern East Asia*, 129.

3 See, for instance, McBride, *Domesticating the Dharma*, 86–138.

science, and technology, the second half of the eighth century produced the most representative examples of Korean Buddhist art: Pulguk Monastery, the Sökkuram grotto, and the bell of Silla King Söngdök. Pulguk Monastery and the Sökkuram cave temple were commissioned by the Silla noble Kim Taemun (d. 775 CE) and demonstrate the high level of math and technology, as well as artistic skill and precision, practised by Silla's master craftsmen specializing in stone carving and monastery construction.⁴ The bronze bell, which was cast in 771, reveals the exceptional quality of Silla bronze-casting technology—far superior to that of contemporary China and Japan.⁵ These artistic creations are evidence of Silla's mastery of many aspects of Sinitic civilization. Silla's importation and manifestation of Sinitic culture in the seventh and eighth centuries, however, was not a passive process of imitation and emulation. Rather, Silla royalty and nobility dynamically adopted and adapted socio-political and cultural practices to serve functional purposes.

Aside from a modest amount of epigraphy and the characteristically laconic treatment of Silla in Chinese and Japanese materials, the primary literary sources for the early history of Silla and Silla Buddhism are *The History of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk sagi*) and *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk yusa*). Both are relatively late sources compiled during the succeeding Koryŏ period (918–1392 CE). The former, an official history that—like other works in the genre—treats material related to Buddhism laconically, was compiled on royal order by the scholar and statesmen Kim Pusik (1075–1151) and was presented to the court in 1146.⁶ The compilation of the latter, a collection of traditional narratives and stories, many of which were culled from now lost books, appears to have been initiated by Iryŏn (1206–1289), amended by his disciple Hon'gu (also called Mugŭk, 1250–1322), and further edited by other unknown hands prior to achieving its present form in 1512. Although the *Samguk yusa* is a late source, it reproduces the language of its original sources with general reliability, and its contents fit well with Chinese and Japanese materials that cover the same period.⁷

Silla (trad., 57 BCE–935 CE) was initially one of four polities located on the Korean Peninsula, along with Koguryŏ (trad., 37 BCE–668 CE), Paekche (trad., 18 BCE–660 CE), and the Kaya confederacy (trad., 42–562 CE). Silla absorbed the lion's share of Kaya between 532 and 562 and assimilated its ruling elites. Silla society, like that of the other early Korean states, was highly stratified and founded on birth status and hereditary privileges. The people of Silla referred to status in terms of “bone” status or rank rather than “blood” as we are accustomed in the West, but the concept functioned in a similar manner. In the sixth century, Silla's bone-rank system (*kolp'um*) emerged as a result of growth, conquest, and assimilation of neighbouring polities and settlements. The bone-rank system consisted of two bone ranks and, in theory, six head ranks (*tup'um*) underneath. The Silla royal family comprised those of holy-bone status (*sönggol*), and

4 See, for instance, McBride, *Domesticating the Dharma*, 120–28.

5 See, for instance, Tsuboi, *Chösengane*.

6 On the *Samguk sagi*, see Shultz, “Introduction”; McBride, “Structure and Sources.”

7 See McBride, “Is the *Samguk yusa* Reliable”; McBride, “Lore of Korean Antiquity.”

capital-based nobles constituted those of true-bone status (*chin'gol*). Local elites from the provinces comprised the head-rank six (*yuktupum*) status, and other well-to-do individuals constituted head ranks five and four. Head ranks three, two, and one, which seldom appear in the surviving records, probably consisted of peasants and slaves and are believed to have melded together after the Silla conquest of much of the peninsula with Tang assistance. Silla's eighteen-level capital-rank system, which secured the highest positions in Silla government for true-bone nobles, evolved vigorously during the sixth century and probably achieved something close to its final form late in the reign of Silla king Chinhŭng (r. 540–576 CE).⁸ The holy-bone royalty died out in the mid seventh century, and kings possessing true-bone status ascended the throne beginning with King Muyŏl (Kim Ch'unch'u, 604–661 CE; r. 654–661 CE). The story of Silla in the early medieval period is indelibly tied to the policies of Silla kings in King Muyŏl's lineage (654–780 CE).

Strengthening Autocratic Rule through Buddhist Symbolism and Confucian Statecraft

For more than a century before the ascension of Kim Ch'unch'u (King Muyŏl) to the throne in 654, the Silla royal family made important strides towards increasing regal authority and autocratic rule by employing Buddhist symbolism, instituting Chinese-style government offices, and reorganizing the country's prefectures. Prior to the sixth century, Silla kings were essentially *primus inter pares* rulers that presided over councils of nobles (*hwabaek*), which required the unanimous agreement of the members. The Silla capital was made up of six regions, and the chieftains of these regions were all considered "qaghans" or "kings" to some degree. According to epigraphic evidence from the early sixth century, the paramount ruler of these "kings" lived in the T'ak region of the capital and was called *maegŭm* or *maegŭmwang*, and a secondary or backup king resided in the second most important section of the capital, the Sat'ak region, and was called *kalmunwang*. After the *kalmunwang* Chijŭng reportedly ascended the throne in 500, *The History of the Three Kingdoms* relates that he inaugurated a more positive policy of adopting Chinese-style official titles and legal forms. According to this source, his son and successor, King Pŏphŭng, ascended the throne in 514 and continued his father's Sinicizing policy. The text says, for instance, that in 517 he first organized a board of war (*pyŏngbu*), one of the most important government organs in Silla.⁹ Somewhat transcendent status for the Silla king was achieved in the 530s by turning over everyday affairs of state to a senior grandee (*sangdaedŭng*), who seems to have represented the

⁸ See McBride, "Can the *Samguk sagi* Be Corroborated through Epigraphy?"

⁹ *Samguk sagi*, 4: 49 (Pŏphŭng 4). The monograph on government offices, however, says it was organized in 516; see *Samguk sagi*, 38: 375 (*pyŏngburyŏng*). The first director of the board of war recorded in the Silla annals was installed in 541; see *Samguk sagi*, 4: 51 (Chinhŭng 2). My position is that although a grandee (*taedŭng*) was certainly charged with supervising the military, he could not have been called *pyŏngburyŏng*. The title probably did not exist until about 651, because this is when other director (*ryŏng*) positions were instituted.

king in councils of nobles, beginning in 531. The *kalmunwang* seems to have represented the hereditary nobility.¹⁰ Over the course of the sixth and seventh centuries, the central organs of the Silla government were organized following Sinitic models. These boards, offices, and bureaus were staffed and headed by individuals possessing hereditary social status defined by the bone-rank and capital-rank systems.

Silla kings enhanced their cultural resources and sought to exhibit legitimacy through the adoption of Buddhist symbolism. Buddhist doctrine provided an early figurative foundation that supported traditional hereditary privileges, enabled Silla kings to assert hallowed status, and empowered the Silla royal family to achieve the social transcendence necessary for it to attempt to control the inherited privileges of the nobility. For instance, King Chinhŭng, who greatly increased Silla territory through war with Koguryŏ and Paekche, emulated the famous Indian king Aśoka (r. ca. 268–232 BCE) and contemporary Liang emperor Wu (r. 502–549 CE) by fervent patronage of the Buddhist church—by the commissioning of several monasteries and images—and the naming of his sons after types of wheel-turning kings (cakravartins) mentioned in Buddhist literature.¹¹ King Chinp'yŏng (r. 579–632 CE) was the son of crown prince Tongnyun (d. 572 CE). Chinp'yŏng's given name was the East Asian equivalent of the father of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, Śuddhodhana (Paekchŏng); his queen was given the same name as the Buddha's mother, the Lady Māyā (Maya puin); and even the names of Chinp'yŏng's brothers Śuklodana (Paekpan) and Drotodana (Kukpan) corresponded to those of Śākyamuni's uncles.¹² Following this method of figurative reasoning, a son born to King Chinp'yŏng and Queen Maya would correspond to Siddhārtha (Śākyamuni). However, they only had daughters, or at least the only children recorded to have achieved maturity were female. The last ruler in Tongnyun's line was Queen Chindŏk (r. 647–654 CE), who had a Buddhist given name, Śrīmālā (Sŭngman), the same as that of a famous female ruler appearing in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature. The Silla nobility acquiesced to Silla rulers' early attempts to achieve a more transcendent status, in part because royalty did not restrict privileges of nobles excessively and because nobles themselves could use Buddhist doctrine and symbolism to justify their positions of power in society. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, the royalty and nobility of Silla relied on each other because Silla's prosperity was threatened by the neighbouring states of Paekche and Koguryŏ. In addition, by turning to Tang China for assistance and adapting Confucian modes of rule, Kim Ch'unch'u acquired symbolic legitimacy and initiated a process whereby his descendants sought to achieve functional political hegemony in Silla Korea.

Kim Ch'unch'u was the grandson of King Chinji (r. 576–579 CE) and Silla's savviest diplomat in the 640s prior to his reign as King Muyŏl (r. 654–661 CE). Kim's diplomatic

¹⁰ *Samguk sagi*, 4: 51 (Pŏphŭng 18). For a more detailed discussion, see Ju, "6 segi ch'o Silla"; McBride, "When Did Rulers?"

¹¹ On King Aśoka in Korea, see Pankaj, "Life and Times"; McBride, *Domesticating the Dharma*, 18, 25–26.

¹² *Samguk sagi*, 4: 41 (Chinp'yŏng 1). See Kim, "Silla sangdae sahoe," esp. 92; Lee, *Silla sasangsa yŏn'gu*, 81.

skills were crucial at this time period, because territorial gains made by Silla on the peninsula during the sixth century were being eroded by a resurgent Paekche and Koguryō. Kim engineered protection from and an alliance with Tang China at the expense of adopting Tang court dress and the Tang calendar, symbolic of becoming a tributary state. The Silla royalty continued to be devout Buddhists and attempted to curb the power of the hereditary nobility, increase autocratic rule, and legitimate its authority through the free application of Confucian principles and statutes articulated in the “Royal Regulations” (*Wang zhi*) chapter of *The Book of Rites* (*Li ji*). The importance of the “Royal Regulations” chapter can be seen in the organization of Silla into nine prefectures with a system of five sacred mountains, the institution of an ancestral temple system, and the establishment of a Confucian-inspired education system (discussed below).

The “Royal Regulations” chapter describes a proper realm as comprising nine prefectures. According to this text, the royal domain was to be surrounded by eight prefectures consisting of numerous walled cities of various sizes, and famous mountains of symbolic consequence and great lakes were not to be included in the lands invested to nobles.¹³ In 685, Silla king Sinmun (r. 681–691 CE) reconfigured the realm instituting a system of nine prefectures for the first time. These nine areas were Ilŏn (central domain), Samnyang (southeast), Hansan (northwest), Suyak (north-central), Hasŭlla (northeast), Soburi (central northwest coast), Wansan (central southwest coast), Chŏng (south-central), and Palla (southwest). It is telling that the same passage in the “Basic Annals of Silla” reports that the Silla court sent an emissary to Tang requesting copies of *The Book of Rites* and other literary works.¹⁴ The two Tang dynastic histories corroborate that Sinmun requested *The Tang Rites* (*Tang li*) and other writings.¹⁵ Although the names of these regions continued to change, more than seventy years later, in 757, King Kyŏngdŏk (r. 742–765 CE) renamed the prefectures with the designations that they were known by for the balance of the Silla period and delineated their constituent districts. According to Kyŏngdŏk’s decree, the central domain, Sangju, was bounded by Yangju, Kangju, and Muju on the south, Ungju and Chŏnju to the west, and Hanju, Sakchu, and Myŏngju to the north (see [Map 7](#)).¹⁶

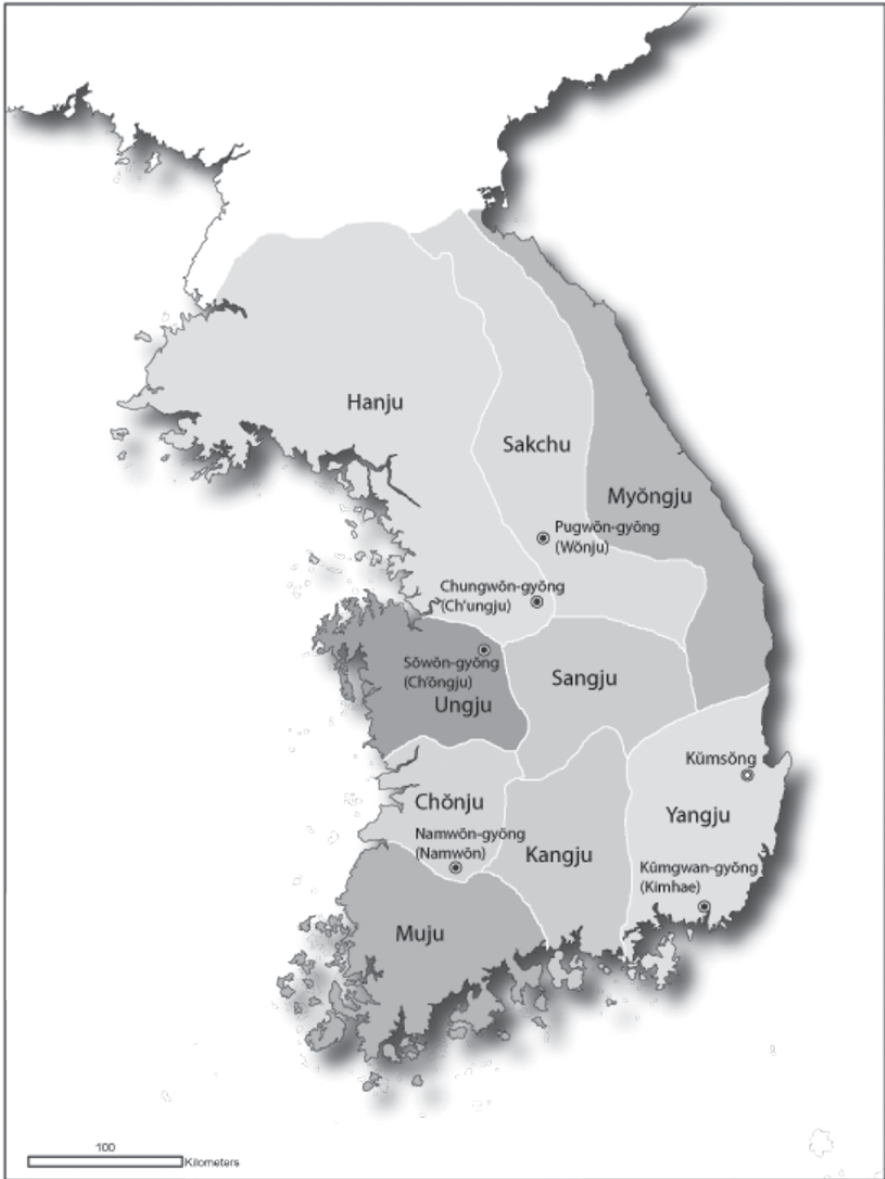
The Silla capital, present-day Kyŏngju, was located in the southeastern sector of the nine prefectures, but, following the symbolic ideals of *The Book of Rites*, it should have been situated in the central domain. In 689, late in his reign, after successfully instituting a system of royal ancestral shrines, Sinmun wanted to move the capital to the city of Talgubŏl (present-day Taegu), which, although still located in the southwestern prefecture, was a central location that enjoyed more secure natural defences than Kyŏngju. The historian Kim Pusik, who lived in the succeeding Koryŏ dynasty, from which the western name for Korea derives, merely mentions Sinmun’s failed attempt to move the capital and communicates no reasons why Sinmun would want to move the capital and

¹³ *Li ji*, “Wangzhi,” 1: 8; cf. Legge, *Sacred Books of China*, 211–12.

¹⁴ *Samguk sagi*, 8: 97 (Sinmun 5).

¹⁵ *Jiu Tang shu*, 199A: 5336; *Xin Tang shu*, 220: 6204.

¹⁶ *Samguk sagi*, 9: 109–10 (Kyŏngdŏk 16).



Map 7. Polities in the Korean Peninsula, 700–900 CE.

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no reasons for his failure.¹⁷ Such a move would have been a gargantuan undertaking because of the practical difficulties of moving and supplying the court and constructing new palaces and government buildings. Although the extant sources are silent, Silla nobles, seeking to maintain their bases of power, would have vehemently opposed the transfer of the capital. A compelling symbolic reason for the transfer of the capital can be found in the fact that the Silla court reconfigured the system of sacrifices to Silla mountains to include a Chinese-inspired model of five marchmounts: The old system of three sacred mountains situated in the Silla heartland received “great sacrifices” (*taesa*), and the new set of five sacred mountains received “midlevel sacrifices” (*chungsa*).¹⁸ The central peak (*chungak*) in the new system was Mount P’algong, which was close to Talguböl. Thus, the move of the capital to Talguböl would figuratively place the Silla royal family near a central mountain conferring symbolic legitimacy in the Sinitic Confucian mode. In other words, by locating the capital near the central peak, the Silla ruler would be temporally and symbolically located in the centre of his realm, thus conferring increased power and authority on the king.

The third section of the “Royal Regulations” chapter of *The Book of Rites* reports that the ancestral temple of a prince of state has five shrines, two on the left and two on the right of the great ancestor.¹⁹ In 687, Sinmun sent high officials to the royal ancestral temple to offer sacrifices. The sacrificial prayer, uttered from the perspective of Sinmun, strongly suggests that the Silla court constructed the site following the conventions articulated in *The Book of Rites*. It refers to five ancestors: the great kings T’aejo,²⁰ Chinji (r. 576–579 CE), Munhŭng,²¹ T’aejong (Muyöl), and Munmu (661–681).²² A century later, in the second month of 785, King Wönsöng (r. 785–798) tore down the ancestral shrines erected by King Söndök (r. 780–785) to his ancestor Söngdök (r. 702–737) and his father Kaesöng. He posthumously invested his ancestors from his father back to his great-great-grandfather and reconstructed the five ancestral shrines of royal family. Wönsöng’s configuration preserved the relevance of the Silla kings who presided over the unification wars: (1) the founder king, (2) T’aejong, (3) Munmu, (4) his grandfather Hŭngp’yöng, and (5) his father Myöngdök.²³ In 801, King Aejang (r. 800–809 CE) created two separate shrines for the great kings T’aejong and Munmu, and reconstructed the five ancestral shrines to reflect his ancestry from his great-great-grandfather Myöngdök

17 *Samguk sagi*, 8: 98 (Sinmun 11).

18 *Samguk sagi*, 32: 323 (*chesa: taesa-chungsa*). On Silla’s adoption of a five-mountain system, see Lee (Ki-baik), *Silla chöngch’i sahoesa*, 194–215.

19 *Li ji*, “Wangzhi,” 3: 4; Legge, *Sacred Books of China*, 223.

20 On the issue of the “grand progenitor” (*t’aejo*) or “founding ancestor” (*sijo*) of Silla, see Mun, *Sillasa yön’gu*, 111–47; Lee, *Silla chöngch’i sahoesa*, 366–77.

21 Munhŭng refers to Kim Ch’unch’u’s father Kim Yongsu (alt. Yongch’un, ca. 580–d. after 643). In 654, he was posthumously granted the title Great King Munhŭng when his son assumed the throne. *Samguk sagi*, 5: 67 (Muyöl 1).

22 *Samguk sagi*, 8: 97 (Sinmun 7).

23 *Samguk sagi*, 10: 114 (Wönsöng 1).

to his grandfather Hyech'ung and father Sosöng.²⁴ In this manner, the Silla royal family derived symbolic legitimacy in the Confucian mode by adopting the customary sacrifices approved for princes of states as described in *The Book of Rites* and ritual literature.

The adoption of Confucian ritual structures was part of a more ambitious royal project to moderate the power of the hereditary nobility and increase autocratic authority. The fourteen principal boards, offices, and bureaus of the Silla government were founded by 686. The separation of the chancellery (*chipsabu*) from the granary authority (*p'umju*) in 651 was an important development.²⁵ The conventional view of the chancellery, championed by Lee Ki-baik, is that Silla monarchs in King Muyö's lineage transferred decision-making power away from the council of nobles led by the senior grandee and empowered the chancellery by its director (*chungsi*) who became the "grand councillor" (*chaesang*) or chief minister of state. Thus, by this process, Silla kings asserted more firm autocratic power.²⁶ More recent scholarship has challenged this model of understanding the nature of royal rule in the mid Silla period, demonstrating that directors of the board of war (*pyöngburyöng*) always ranked higher than the director of the chancellery, and that nobles who served as directors of the chancellery typically were advanced to director of the board of war, indicating that the board of war was superior to the chancellery.²⁷ Unlike the case of the Tang imperium during the reigns of the Empress Wu Zetian (r. 690–705 CE) and Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756), when the examination system and other policies were employed as a means to subordinate of the great clans of the hereditary military aristocracy to the Tang imperial family,²⁸ Silla kings characteristically shared power with close relatives, and other true-bone nobles possessing the prized Kim surname dominated all the chief positions in the Silla government.²⁹

The institution of the administration chamber (*chöngsadang*) in the late seventh or early eighth century was an important administrative innovation that was intended to solve the problems caused by having a council of nobles that was too large and unwieldy—and with too many dissenting voices.³⁰ The administration chamber of Silla was an adaptation of real Tang-style government, which appeared no earlier than the reign of the Tang emperor Gaozu (618–626 CE). The early Tang administration chamber (*zhengshitang*) was made up of ten to twelve men, was headed by three grand councillors (*chaesang*, Chinese *zaixiang*), and was attended by the heads of ministries, boards, and other talented leaders, such as the director of the chancellery. The Silla administration chamber was probably similar. Silla kings in the late seventh and early eighth centuries probably attended regularly, just like their Tang counterparts in the early Tang period (618–712 CE). Members of the

24 *Samguk sagi*, 10: 118 (Aejang 2).

25 *Samguk sagi*, 5: 66 (Chindök 5).

26 See Lee, *Silla chöngch'i sahoesa*, 149–74.

27 *Samguk sagi*, 38: 375 (pyöngburyöng). See Shin, *Silla pyöngburyöng ko*; Shin, *T'ongil Sillasa yön'gu*, 164.

28 Chen, *Tang dai zheng*, 14; Guisso, *Politics of Legitimation*, 70–106.

29 See Jeon, "Constitution of the Ruling Elite"; and Ha Il Sik, "Dynastic Crisis."

30 The discussion that follows is based on McBride, "Evolution of Councils."

council included not only prestigious nobles but also close relatives of the Silla king. King Muyōl (Kim Ch'unch'u) came to the throne in 654 through a coup overturning a decision by the council of nobles,³¹ so it is reasonable to suggest that he would have supported the creation of a smaller more powerful council modelled on the early Tang mode of aristocratic governance. In the second half of the seventh century, the senior grandee Kim Yusin (595–673 CE), who was also King Muyōl's brother-in-law, certainly supported the king and was a member of the administration chamber, as were probably several of the other high-ranking nobles closely affiliated with the royal family. However, younger talented individuals, such as those serving as director of the chancellery or the board of rites could participate more freely and actively. In other words, by concentrating power in a smaller group, the administration chamber could perhaps bypass certain senior nobles whose positions were contrary to the king and his supporters. Similar to the functioning of the early Tang administration chamber, the heads of key ministries and bureaus participated in discussions and decisions on such matters as the creation and implementation of policy and other important matters of governance under the direction of a senior grand councillor and other junior or secondary grand councillors. By the first quarter of the eighth century, the administration chamber headed by the senior grand councillor (*sangjae*) seems to have become fairly well established. During the eighth century, the senior grand counsellor was recognized as the head of the administration chamber, supervised day-to-day government, and was sometimes the same as the senior grandee. The senior grandee (*sangdaedŭng*) was still the most prestigious position in Silla society, but that high-ranking noble's most important job became holding the government together for the selection of kings and the transitional period between reigns. Most grand councillors were close relatives of the reigning Silla king either by birth or marriage. Japanese records and Silla epigraphy clearly demonstrate that in many instances the senior grand councillor effectively outranked the senior grandee and that some even assumed the throne. Prior to the transitional period between 765 and 780, both the senior councillor and senior grandee were close supporters of the king. Although the organization of the chancellery in 651 was important in the development of the statecraft system, the council of the administration chamber was superior to it and provided it with direction and guidance. The director of the chancellery was probably a member of the administration chamber, but directors of the board of war and other closely related and confidential advisers to the Silla king typically served as the senior grand councillor.³² The director of the board of war may have dominated the administration chamber because, as a conquest state, the Silla government was preoccupied with the management of subjugated and enslaved peoples in the former Paekche and Koguryō regions, and with guarding its northern borders against the state of Parhae (Chinese: Bohai; 698–926 CE).

Although the details are sparse, the remaining documentary evidence suggests that from the mid seventh to the mid eighth centuries Silla kings also attempted to curb the

31 *Samguk sagi*, 42: 410 (Kim Yusin 2).

32 Kimura, "Shiragi no saishō seido," esp. 26–27; Shin, *Sillasa*, 132–46; Yi (Inch'öl), *Silla ch'ongch'i chedosa*, 112–13; Lee, *Silla sasangsa yŏn'gu*, 278–328, esp. 308–10; Yi (Yŏngho), *Silla chungdae ūi ch'ongch'i*, 116–69, esp. 139–40.

power of the nobility by exercising more firm control over land. Two systems of land tenure functioned in early Silla prior to the unification wars (ca. 660–668 CE). The highest-ranking members of the Silla nobility received “emolument villages” (*sigŭp*), which functioned like prebendal fiefs, and held them in perpetuity. For instance, General Kim Yusin received 500 plots (*kyŏl*) of farm land and six horse farms for his services. Of the 174 horse farms in Silla existing in 669, twenty-two were allotted to the royal family, ten to government officers, six to Kim Yusin (the king’s maternal uncle), six to Kim Inmun (629–694 CE; the king’s younger brother), and the remainder to other nobles with high capital ranks.³³ The majority of land converted into emolument villages derived from the conquest of Paekche. Most of Silla’s government officials, however, were paid for their services by being apportioned “stipend villages” (*nogŭp*). The elites who received this form of salary not only appropriated the grain tax from the lands under their control but are also believed to have been able to mandate the *corvée* labour of the peasants who worked the land.³⁴ Thus, regions that were granted as stipend villages were doubly dominated by both the state and the noble holding official rank. *The New History of the Tang* (*Xin Tang shu*) reports on the economic wealth enjoyed by the highest-ranking officials:

The house of the Grand Councillor [enjoys] never ending official pay: 3,000 slaves, armoured troops, oxen, horses, and pigs are suitable for one [of his station]. Livestock are pastured on a mountain in the middle of the sea, and when they are needed for food, they shoot them with arrows. They loan grain and rice on interest to people, and if they do not repay them in full it is commonplace for [those people] to become slaves.³⁵

Several scholars suggest that Silla rulers would have liked to implement an equal-field system (*kyunjŏn*) as in medieval China.³⁶ In 486, Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471–499 CE) of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534 CE) instituted a policy modified from an earlier Jin dynasty (265–420 CE) version, in which massive amounts of state-owned land were divided into family-sized plots and given to peasants in exchange for taxes and labour service on government-approved construction projects. This policy was further modified by the subsequent northern Chinese dynasties and continued into the early Tang period. Although the Tang made many modifications to the law, the basic principle of the policy was that all adult males owned equal land and, consequently, owed equal taxes during the course of their tax-paying lives. The law was intended to control and dissuade the accumulation of large estates by officials and powerful families.³⁷ Formative steps to control abuses and exert state control over all land in the Silla domain were taken by the royal family in 687, when King Sinmun inaugurated a system of granting office-land

33 *Samguk sagi*, 6: (Munmu 9).

34 Lee (Ki-baik), *Silla chŏngch'i sahoesa*, 77.

35 *Xin Tang shu*, 220: 6202 (Xinluo).

36 Yi (Hŭigwan), *T'ongil Silla t'oji*, 298; Han, *Silla chungdae yullyŏng*, 172–75. Korean scholars typically interpret this as deriving from the influence of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534), and not the Tang dynasty.

37 See Twitchett, *Financial Administration*, 1–48; Xiong, “Land-Tenure System”; Lewis, *Cosmopolitan Empire*, 54–57.

(*kwallyojön*), and in 689, when King Sinmun abolished the system of stipend villages and established a graded system of annual grain grants (*cho*).³⁸ This change seems to have been done to limit the Silla nobility, as much as possible, from exercising direct control over the peasant population to assert and establish the idea of the royal possession of land. Office-land was granted to incumbent officials, and the order of the system drew inspiration from the evolving land systems in China as well as bearing some similarities with the contemporary system in Japan.³⁹ Although brief statements in *The History of the Three Kingdoms* note that adult male land was distributed in 722 and that an inspector position was established in 748 to examine the misdeeds of officials,⁴⁰ attempts to redefine the land system, however, proved to be doomed to failure because of the socio-economic immaturity of the peasants and a tradition of hereditary privileges among the true-bone nobility that was hard to break. In other words, Silla's highly stratified bone-rank system was an impediment to Silla's developing a balanced economy like more advanced states on the Eurasian continent. True-bone nobles dominated other lesser social elites and especially ordinary farmers, unlike the case of medieval Chinese states where rulers enacted laws to protect the "good people" (free, landowning farmers) who were the most important tax base, which retarded the development of a diverse economy in Silla. Anecdotes in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* suggest tensions between landowning elites and government representatives in the late seventh and early eighth centuries.⁴¹ Needing to make concessions to the true-bone nobility to garner their support for other measures, King Kyöngdök revived the stipend village program and discontinued office-land and annual grain grants as the method for paying the salaries of Silla officials in 757.⁴² After the revival of the stipend village program in the second half of the eighth century and the weakening of royal power in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, these regions increasingly became understood as private lands held by the true-bone nobility and served as the basis for several nobles becoming great landowning lords in the late Silla period (ca. 780–935 CE).⁴³

King Kyöngdök, as discussed previously, renamed the nine prefectures and defined their jurisdictions in 757. Then, two years later, he changed the names of office titles following Chinese patterns in 759.⁴⁴ After his son King Hyegong (r. 765–780 CE) came to rule in his own right following the regency of his mother, however, the old office titles were restored in 776.⁴⁵ The conventional interpretation of these events is muddled. Kyöngdök's renaming the office titles is held to be evidence of autocratic rule by the monarch, and the return to the old titles during the reign of his son has been interpreted

38 *Samguk sagi*, 8: 97–98 (Sinmun 7, 9).

39 Yi (Hüigwan), *T'ongil Silla t'oji*, 296; Yoon, "Village Society."

40 *Samguk sagi*, 8: 102 (Söngdök 21); *Samguk sagi*, 9: 108 (Kyöngdök 7).

41 See, for instance, Han, *Silla chungdae yullyöng*, 141–44.

42 *Samguk sagi* (Kyöngdök 16); see also Yi (Hüigwan), *T'ongil Silla t'oji*, 98–124.

43 Yi (Hüigwan), *T'ongil Silla t'oji*, 296.

44 *Samguk sagi*, 9: 109–10 (Kyöngdök 16, 18).

45 *Samguk sagi*, 9: 112 (Hyegong 12).

as the denial of despotic control by Silla nobles because Kyōngdōk putatively pushed Sinicization too far. This interpretation, however, does not take into account the restoration of the stipend village system in 757, which reveals that the power and influence of the hereditary nobility had already revived. In essence, the adoption of Chinese-style office titles in 759 by the court was not a significant development—it was superficial. In addition, because Japan and Parhae also renamed their bureaucratic office titles along Chinese lines in 758 and 759, respectively, it may merely reflect symbolic affirmation of Tang culture when the Chinese state was floundering in the midst of the An Lushan–Shi Siming rebellion (755–763 CE).⁴⁶

Despite the successful implementation of Chinese-style administrative and ritual structures modelled on *The Book of Rites* in the late seventh and eighth centuries, the Silla government was not really modelled after Tang China. In some respects, the adoption of Tang institutional titles was merely cosmetic because power and decision-making ability was monopolized in small councils of nobles that consisted primarily of individuals closely related to the king and who controlled the most powerful positions in government. Sinicization was superficial because, although Chinese-style titles and designations were adopted, the actual functioning of the administrative structures privileged and preserved the inherent stratification within Silla society. Although medieval Chinese states were also highly stratified, opportunities for social advancement by people of lower social status were intrinsic in Chinese society. Furthermore, Silla kings in Muyōl's lineage (654–780 CE) did not succeed in breaking the power of the hereditary nobility. Instead, the political flexibility exercised by the Silla state in the late seventh and early eighth centuries slowly ossified because preservation of the hereditary privileges enjoyed by the true-bone nobility made the state unable to adapt to their evolving political situation by utilizing administrative skills possessed by lower-ranking (head-rank-six) elites. Nevertheless, even this superficial similarity to Chinese governmental structures served to enhance Silla's prestige in Tang eyes because it made Silla appear as an advanced, civilized land—not a backward, barbarian one—and in time Silla was considered to be a country of Confucian “gentlemen.”

Fostering Relations through Diplomacy, Trade, Tribute, and Immigration

The Silla–Tang alliance engineered by Kim Ch'unch'u in the 640s and 650s eventually bore fruit with the conquests of Paekche in 660 and Koguryō in 668, and changed the map of Northeast Asia by the beginning of the eighth century. Most of the Paekche and Koguryō aristocrats were relocated to Tang China, though some escaped to Japan. Although Silla was able to consolidate its authority over and administer all of the conquered Paekche territory, its control of former Koguryō lands in the north only extended to about the Taedong river. Remnant Koguryō military leaders and lesser nobility that did not submit

⁴⁶ Yi (Yōngho), *Silla chungdae ūi chōngch'i*, 106–34. *Shoku Nihongi*, 21 (Tenpyō Hōji 2, 8, 25); Song, *Parhae chōngch'isa yōn'gu*, 108.

to Silla rule coalesced around General Tae Choyŏng (King Ko; r. 698–719 CE), who was probably of Malgal (Chinese: Mohe) extraction and who founded the Parhae kingdom in 698, in conjunction with his Malgal tribespeople. Silla's relations with Parhae, a hybrid state in Manchuria that claimed to be the successor of Koguryŏ, were typically tense and occasionally belligerent.⁴⁷

From the mid seventh to mid ninth centuries, Silla engaged in diplomatic and trading activities, primarily with Tang China but also with Japan. Although no information remains regarding quantities, tribute usually included silk fabric, precious metals, ginseng, hunting birds, and handicrafts such as paper. On a few occasions dancing girls were sent as tribute. Trade items with Japan typically consisted of plant and animal-based substances used in medicines, mineral and plant substances used in dyes and paints, which Silla had imported from China and West Asian countries. Native products traded included everyday items and housewares often made from brass; ritual instruments, such as walking sticks with rings; and other miscellaneous items, such as bezoar.⁴⁸ Although Silla-Tang relations were particularly strained between the 670s and early 690s, when King Sŏngdŏk (r. 702–737 CE) assumed the throne in 702 he embarked on a serious effort at détente with Tang China. Silla dispatched forty-six diplomatic missions over the course of his thirty-six-year reign, and his successors continued to maintain frequent contact with the Tang imperium until the mid ninth century. These missions took many forms: bearing tribute, extending congratulations, offering condolences, and so forth. Extant Tang documentary materials and government records document many exotic treasures and rare foodstuffs gifted from the Silla royal family to the Tang court as tribute during this period.⁴⁹

The two Tang dynastic histories strongly suggest that Silla's primary interest in tribute relations with Tang, aside from the protection promised for submission and inclusion in the Tang-centred world, was the acquisition of Chinese books and training in Sinitic ritual, literary, and educational culture in the second half of the seventh century and first half of the eighth century. In 648, the Silla queen Chindŏk dispatched Kim Ch'unch'u to the Tang court. He requested to visit the imperial university, to observe the commemoration rituals performed on behalf of Confucius (*shidian*, Korean: *sŏkchon*) and to attend lectures on the *Analects*. Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649 CE) then bestowed upon him copies of the *Wen tang* (*[Stele Inscription of the] Warm Hot Springs*), the *Jinsi bei* (*Stele [Inscription] of the Jin Shrine*), and the newly compiled *Jin shu* (*History of the Jin*), all of which were models of Tang scholarship, calligraphy, and writing.⁵⁰ In 686,

⁴⁷ For a general study of Parhae, see Northeast Asia History Foundation, *New History*.

⁴⁸ Verschuer, *Perilous Sea*, 11–13.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, references to exotic gifts from Silla to the Tang court discussed in Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, passim.

⁵⁰ *Jiu Tang shu*, 199A: 5335–36. The *Wentang* was written by Taizong's father, the Emperor Gaozu (r. 618–626 CE) when he travelled to the hot springs at Lishan. The *Jinsi bei* was composed by Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649 CE) when he visited his family's ancestral temple in Taiyuan.

Silla king Sinmun (Kim Chǒngmyǒng) dispatched emissaries who arrived at the court for the purpose of presenting a memorial to the emperor requesting the *Tang li* (*Rites of Tang*), in one section, and other miscellaneous writings. The dowager empress Wu Zetian commanded the authorities responsible to copy the *Jixiong yaoli* (*Essential Rites on Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness*). She also specifically chose the section “Admonitions” (*Guijie*) from the *Wenguan cilin* (*Forest of Fine Phrases from the Literary Institute*), insisting that a complete set in fifty rolls be bestowed on the Silla emissaries.⁵¹ In 728, King Sǒngdǒk dispatched emissaries bearing tribute in local products. In addition, these ambassadors presented a memorial to the imperial throne requesting that they be taught Chinese learning and erudition (refined composition in literary Chinese) and the teachings of the classics. Tang emperor Xuanzong approved the petition.⁵²

Silla-Tang relations reached their peak in the mid eighth century. In 733, Parhae attacked Dengzhou, an important port city on the northern coast of the Shandong peninsula. One of King Sǒngdǒk’s relatives, Kim Saran, had been brought to the Tang court—probably as a “hostage”—and had been appointed supernumerary chief minister of the court of the imperial stud. He was immediately dispatched to his home country to raise troops to repel the Malgal—a pejorative term referring to the Parhae state. The Silla king fulfilled his responsibility admirably by sending troops to attack the Malgal in a pincer movement in concert with allied Tang forces and was rewarded with increased titles from the Chinese court. Later, in 737, after the passing of Sǒngdǒk, Tang emperor Xuanzong dispatched the admonisher of the left, grand master and vice minister of the court of state ceremonial Xing Shu to go to Silla to perform rites of mourning and to invest the new Silla king. *The Old History of the Tang* (*Jiu Tangshu*) records the Tang emperor’s positive assessment of Silla culture:

When [Xing] Shu was about to depart, His Majesty composed an impromptu lyric poem and preface; the heir apparent and all the hundred staff officers in his entourage composed poems and sent them with him. His Majesty instructed Shu, “Silla may be called a country of gentleman. They are very knowledgeable about writings and records and are similar to China. Because of your craft in instructing and because you are skilled in lecturing on treatises you have been selected as the emissary to fulfill this assignment. When you arrive there you should expound and advocate the classics of the Confucian canon and cause them to realize the flourishing of Confucianism in our great country.”⁵³

In this passage, Tang emperor Xuanzong confirms that Silla is “country of [Confucian] gentlemen” (*kunjuguk*; Chinese: *junziguo*). Tang recognition of Silla’s mastery of model Confucian behaviour as a subordinate state in the Tang-centred world was very important and functioned as a unifying motif justifying Silla’s possession of Sinitic civilization and culture as articulated in *The History of the Three Kingdoms*.⁵⁴ In addition to Tang

⁵¹ *Jiu Tang shu*, 199A: 5336.

⁵² *Jiu Tang shu*, 199A: 5337.

⁵³ *Jiu Tang shu*, 199A: 5337. Translation by Richard D. McBride II.

⁵⁴ See McBride, “Structure and Sources,” 519–27.

acknowledgement of Silla's shared Confucian culture, the Tang emperor learned that among the Silla people were many who were skilled at playing *gō* (*qi*; Korean: *paduk*). For this cause, he had the champion *gō* player Yang Jiying of the guard command and military service section made Xing Shu's assistant. When the Tang emissary and his entourage arrived in Silla they were treated with great respect by the Sillans. The Chinese histories report that all the highest *gō* wizards in Silla were inferior to Yang Jiying, and that they lavishly gifted Xing Shu and his entourage with golden treasures, medicines, and so forth.⁵⁵

From the mid seventh century to the mid ninth century, many Silla people migrated to Tang China and formed communities on the Yellow Sea coast. Tang records typically referred to these communities as "Silla precincts" (*Xinluofang*) and "Silla settlements" (*Xinluocun*). A precinct (*fang*) is a sub-district (*xian*) unit that is the urban counterpart of a rural village (*li*). Building on the research of Imanishi Ryū, Edwin O. Reischauer asserted that Silla people were engaged primarily in maritime trade and were permitted to establish these communities because of their superior navigation skills. In this connection, he further claimed that the people of Silla enjoyed "extraterritorial privileges" as part of the stipulations associated with the founding of these settlements.⁵⁶ More recent research has demonstrated that although these communities of Silla people certainly enjoyed a degree of autonomy, they were unquestionably subject to district magistrates (*xianling*) through their precinct heads (*fangzheng*) and settlement chiefs (*cunchang*), who were responsible to the district magistrate for the precinct or settlement's fulfillment of government-imposed obligations, such as special levies and *corvée* labour.⁵⁷

The people who lived in these Silla communities may be divided into roughly two groups: (1) Tang people of Silla heritage or extraction; and (2) non-naturalized Sillans living in Tang. Both types of people helped facilitate cultural interaction between Tang and Silla. The first group of people were familiar not only with the language, customs, and mores of Silla but, more importantly, were proficient in spoken Chinese and local government procedures. Some, depending on their wealth, were also probably competent in literary Chinese. These people were mainstays of the Silla communities in Tang, and it was they who enabled the Silla precincts and settlements to grow and prosper. Nevertheless, the second group, the non-naturalized individuals, also played a vital role in this process by continually invigorating the community with new blood and energy, as well as strengthening connections back with the Silla homeland.

Although merchants comprised a significant component of both groups of Silla people in Tang, the families of these people diversified in occupations as they established residency on the eastern coast of Tang. In addition, Chinese and Korean historical literature record examples of three other kinds of individuals who sought to improve their circumstances in Tang: soldiers of fortune, Buddhist monks, and student-scholars. Many, if not most, of these men probably left Silla because possessing a birth

⁵⁵ *Jiu Tang shu*, 199A: 5337; *Xin Tang shu*, 220: 6205.

⁵⁶ Ryū, *Shiragishi kenkyū*, 341–52; Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels*, 281–87.

⁵⁷ Kwōn, *Chaedang Sillain*, 23–25.

status of head-rank-six or lower would have disqualified them from attaining positions of high status and authority in the Silla government, regardless of their skills or abilities. Because the Chinese military and civil-service system made greater allowance for personal merit, many young men of Silla who lacked birth status sought to parlay rank, title, and experience in Tang into rank in Silla. These men would have depended on the people in Silla communities on China's east coast while their papers were processed by the Tang authorities. No records exist of the numbers of student-scholars residing in Tang during the eighth century; however, *Important Documents from the Tang* (*Tang huiyao*) reports that 216 Silla students dwelt in Tang in 837, and Chinese and Korean records narrate that 105 hostages and students who had completed their terms of service or study were sent back together in 840.⁵⁸ These numbers probably represent only Silla students enrolled in such Tang academies as the school for the sons of the state (*guozixue*) and the imperial university (*taixue*), which operated in the Tang capital Chang'an. Many young men of Silla extraction probably bided their time in Silla communities along the coast waiting for official notices of acceptance into schools, official approvals to train at Buddhist monastic complexes, and other opportunities to arise, such as the well-known case of the Japanese monk Ennin (794–864 CE) who, in 839–840, was able to secrete himself in the Silla-run Fahua cloister that was erected by the Silla merchant prince Chang Pogo (d. 841 or 846 CE) on Mount Chi in the Wendeng district on Shandong peninsula.⁵⁹

Although they were active late in the period under consideration in this essay, Chang Pogo and his comrade Chǒng Yǒn exemplify Silla people who viewed Tang as a land of opportunity during the eighth and ninth centuries. The "Account of Silla" in *The New History of the Tang* reports that they "were both masters of fighting and warfare and were skilled in using the spear." Chǒng excelled Chang in feats of athletic and military prowess, but Chang was superior in tactical warfare and strategic thinking. They were highly competitive with each other, and each wanted to outdo the other. Both had come from Silla, and both advanced in service of the Tang, becoming vice-generals (*xiaojiang*) in the Wuning army. That lowborn Silla men could come to Tang and become subordinate generals in the Chinese army suggests something of the range of opportunities available to non-Chinese people in the Tang empire. Nevertheless, Chang Pogo eventually gave up his commission, returned to his homeland, and approached the Silla king saying, "Throughout China, people of Silla have been made slaves. I desire to establish a garrison in Ch'ŏnghae so that pirates will not pillage our people and take them west."⁶⁰ Silla was not the sole victim of piracy and slavery in the coastal areas along the Yellow Sea, but Silla female slaves had been prized as personal maids, concubines, and entertainers in rich houses since at least the seventh century.⁶¹ Ch'ŏnghae (present-day

58 *Tang huiyao*, 36: 668; *Jiu Tang shu*, 199A: 5339; cf. *Samguk sagi*, 11: 127 (Munsǒng 2).

59 *Nittō guhō junrei kōki*, 2 [Kaicheng 4 [Jōwa 6, 839]/6/7]; for an English translation see Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels*, 131.

60 *Xin Tang shu*, 220: 6206; *Samguk sagi*, 44: 428–29 (Chang Pogo–Chǒng Yǒn).

61 *Tang huiyao*, 86: 1572; Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 44.

Wando Island in Chōlla Province) was a strategic location on the sea lanes. The Silla king gave Chang a large force of men to protect Silla interests in the Yellow Sea area. From that time forward and until after the death of Chang in 841 or 846, the people of Silla were well protected from being enslaved.⁶²

Finding himself a miserable wayfarer in a frontier region in China, Chōng Yōn decided to return to his homeland and seek service with Chang. Although there had been animosity between them due to their competitive natures, the editors of *The New History of the Tang* claim that Chōng considered death by warfare in his homeland superior to freezing to death in a foreign land, so he returned to Silla. When Chōng arrived in Ch'ōnghae Garrison, Chang Pogo had just learned that the Silla king had been killed in a coup by high-ranking ministers in Silla. He dispatched Chōng under his authority to rectify the situation. Chōng suppressed the rebels and enthroned a new king. In gratitude, Chang Pogo's influence at the Silla court increased for a time, and he is reported to have been raised to the rank of "grand councillor" (*sang*). Chōng then took over for Chang as protector of the Ch'ōnghae garrison.⁶³ Chang's attempt to rise above his station, however, was thwarted in the end. Chang sought to marry his daughter to King Munsōng (r. 839–857 CE), but was rebuffed, so he fomented rebellion. Fearful of his military powers, the Silla court had him assassinated by a turncoat associate in either 841 or 846.⁶⁴

Increased contact with Tang, as evidenced through numerous regular official tribute and trade missions (and probably a considerable number of unofficial ones) and the emergence of permanent Silla communities along the eastern seacoast of Tang, contributed to increased knowledge and practical experience with Chinese cultural mores and educational traditions. The limited historiographical materials remaining from the period suggest that the eighth century was the pivotal period in the Sinification of Silla's system for educational system for the hereditary nobility.

Bolstering of the System for Educating Nobles through Confucian Learning

Most scholars of early Korea agree that Silla's bone-rank system, its rigid system of hereditary privilege and social status, did not become firmly established until the sixth century and, more critically, that youths of noble and elite status in Silla society learned the order, opportunities, and limitations of the bone-rank system through their participation in the *hwarang* (lit. "flower boy") institution.⁶⁵ The *hwarang* are believed to have developed out of local, village, or rural youth organizations of the early three-kingdoms era (ca. 300–935 CE) that were appropriated and reorganized into a more

⁶² *Xin Tang shu*, 220: 6206; *Samguk sagi*, 44: 428–29 (Chang Pogo–Chōng Yōn).

⁶³ *Xin Tang shu*, 220: 6206; *Samguk sagi*, 44: 428–29 (Chang Pogo–Chōng Yōn).

⁶⁴ *Shoku Nihon kōki*, 11 [Jōwa 9 [842]/1] says that Chang Pogo died in the eleventh month of 841 [Jōwa 8; Munsōng 3]; *Nittō guhō junrei kōki*, 1 [Kaicheng 4 [Jōwa 6, 839]/4/2], 4 [Huichang 4 [844]/7/9] seems to support this; see also Reischauer, *Ennin's Travels*, 100, 377–78. The *Samguk sagi*, 11: 128 (Munsōng 8), however, reports this in 846.

⁶⁵ Lee (Kidong), *Silla kolp'umje*, 330–58; Lee (Jong-Wook), *Silla kolp'umje yōn'gu*, 372–73, 390.

centralized *hwarang* order to promote the prerogatives of the Silla royalty and nobility during the time of King Chinhŭng (r. 540–576 CE).⁶⁶ *The History of the Three Kingdoms*, citing Kim Taemun's (ca. 704 CE) *Generations of the Hwarang (Hwarang segi)*, says of the *hwarang*: "Worthy assistants and loyal ministers issued forth from these and well-bred generals and brave warriors arose from these."⁶⁷ Thus, the *hwarang* organization was a means of educating and developing the leadership, martial, and cultural skills of noble and elite youths to prepare them for future service to the state. The *hwarang* order consisted of several *hwarang* bands, each comprising a leader, known as a *hwarang*, who was of true-bone status, and ranks of commoner *nangdo* (followers) under the leader. Some *hwarang* bands are said to have numbered more than 1,000 followers. In some limited cases, Buddhist monks figured among the followers in some *hwarang* bands and served as attendants and advisers. *Hwarang* received specialized training in music, ritual, and roaming and camping in the mountains between the ages of fifteen to eighteen. Blood oaths were often made between members of the *hwarang*.

The *hwarang* were drawn from the noble families of Silla's expanding domain; and, because some youths, such as Kim Yusin, were scions of Kaya's royalty and nobility, the bands of *hwarang* appear to have ameliorated cultural and social tensions between Silla and Kaya, a confederacy of petty states in the southeastern region of the Korean Peninsula that was annexed primarily by Silla between 532 and 562. In other words, the youth of Silla learned their place in Silla's emerging bone-rank social system and carved out niches for themselves through the martial and ritual activities of the *hwarang*. Evidence of the *hwarang*, although limited, sufficiently demonstrates that Silla was an evolving hybrid society and that nationalistic notions proposed by modern scholars of unchanging, homogeneous cultural patterns are misplaced. The *hwarang* encapsulate the profound changes effecting Silla society from the sixth through the tenth centuries. The *hwarang* seem to have played a significant role in Silla's conquest of most of the peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries; but after Silla normalized relations with the Tang court in the early eighth century, Silla's elites increasingly adopted and adapted Sinitic bureaucratic approaches, intellectual positions, and social mores. Simply stated, the goals of the *hwarang* turned from war to play—sophistication and erudition. Literary sources, such *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, describe the characteristics of the *hwarang* in terms of the highest ideals of Sinitic aristocratic culture, such as their mastering the six classical arts of propriety, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, they were simultaneously conceived of as embodying an aspect of Silla's indigenous spiritual and ritual culture, particularly with respect to their composition of *hyangga* (native songs) and their perambulations in Silla's sacred mountains, rivers, and other locations. Furthermore, the evolution of the *hwarang* organization and its close association with Buddhist monks and the Buddhist church illustrates the extent to which Buddhism came to dominate and define the religious and cultural milieu of the Silla kingdom by envisioning the remote past and the future of the land of

66 Mishina, *Shiragi karō no kenkyū*; Lee (Kidong), *Silla kolp'umje sahoe*, 32–33.

67 *Samguk sagi*, 4: 54 (Chinhŭng 37).

68 *Samguk yusa*, 3: 153 (Mirŭk sōhwa).

Silla as a Buddha-land rather than a remote borderland. Being linked first through the encompassing cult of Maitreya and eventually through music, song, and thaumaturgy, the two institutions were mutually entwined, and both, in their own ways, enabled the people of Silla to embrace beliefs and practices of a universal, cosmopolitan culture spanning much of Buddhist Asia as well as to maintain a sense of pride in their own indigenous customs, beliefs, and practices.⁶⁹

Queen Chindök established a board of rites in 651, probably following the recommendation of Kim Ch'unch'u who had visited the Tang court in 648. Later, after the unification wars, King Sinmun started Silla's state academy (*kukhak*) in the sixth lunar month of 682, under the jurisdiction of the board of rites.⁷⁰ Although the *hwarang* institution continued, many Silla youths must have received some Chinese-style education in the state academy. Much of what can be known about the state academy is found in the monograph on government offices in *The History of the Three Kingdoms*:

The state academy was subject to the board of rites. King Kyöngdök renamed it the directorate of education (*taehakkam*). King Hyegong restored the former designation. There was one chief minister (*kyöng*). King Kyöngdök renamed the office the director of studies (*saöp*). King Hyegong restored the title chief minister. He ranked the same as other chief ministers. There were several erudites (*paksa*). (Because there were quite a few of them the exact number was not kept.) There were also several instructors (*chogyo*). (Because there were quite a few of them the exact number was not kept.) There were two great retainers (*taesa*, rank 12). In her fifth year (651 CE), Queen Chindök organized this office. King Kyöngdök renamed the office recorder (*chubu*). King Hyegong restored the title great retainer. Those ranking from *saji* (rank 13) to *nama* (rank 11) served in this capacity. There were two scribes (*sa*). In his first year (765 CE), King Hyegong added two more.

The standard course of study was divided up into instruction on *The Book of Changes* (*Zhouyi*), *Book of Documents* (*Shang shu*), *Book of Odes* (*Mao shi*) [as edited by Mao Heng and Mao Chang], *Book of Rites* (*Li ji*), *The Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Zuoshizhuan*), and *Literary Selections* (*Wenxuan*). An erudite or an instructor would teach *The Book of Rites*, *Book of Changes*, *Analects* (*Lunyu*), and *Classic on Filial Piety* (*Xiao jing*). Or, they would teach the *Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, *Book of Changes*, *Analects*, and *Classic of Filial Piety*. Or, they would teach the *Book of Documents*, *Analects*, *Classic of Filial Piety*, and *Literary Selections*.

All students read books in order to become graduates [with one of the] three degrees (*samp'um ch'ulsin*). Those who read *The Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, *Book of Rites*, or *Literary Selections* and were able to comprehend its meaning and also were able to elucidate on the *Analects* and *Classic of Filial Piety* were graduated in the high ranking. Those who read *Minutiae of Etiquette* (*Qu li*), the *Analects*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety* were graduated in the middle ranking. Those who read *Minutiae of Etiquette* and the *Classic of Filial Piety* were graduated in the low ranking. If there were those who were able to [demonstrate] complete comprehension of the Five Classics,⁷¹ the

⁶⁹ See McBride, "Buddhism and the Hwarang."

⁷⁰ *Samguk sagi*, 8: 96 (Sinmun 2).

⁷¹ The Five Classics (*wujing*) are *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*), *Book of History* (*Shujing*), *Book of Rites* (*Li ji*), and *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*).

Three Histories,⁷² and the Writings of the Hundred Schools of Philosophers,⁷³ [the state] advanced and selected them for government employment. Or [they] were commissioned as erudites of the Mathematics School (*sanhak paksa*) or as one of the instructors. They taught the *Book on the Composition Technique* (*Zhui jing*,⁷⁴ *Triple Root Extraction* (*Sankai*),⁷⁵ [*Mathematical Procedures in*] *Nine Chapters* (*Jiuzhang*),⁷⁶ and *Six Categories* [*of Mathematical Methods*] (*Yukchang*).⁷⁷

All students ranked from beneath that of *taesa* (rank 12) to those without rank. All coursework was satisfied by young students between the ages of fifteen and thirty years. If students were stupid and unlettered and did not improve after nine years they were expelled. If there were those whose talents and abilities had shown some improvement and yet had not yet matured, even though they had exceeded their nine years they were allowed to remain in school. Once they had attained the rank of *taenama* (rank 10) or *nama* (rank 11) they were graduated from the school.⁷⁸

72 The Three Histories (*sanshi*) are *The Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*), *The History of the Former Han* (*Hanshu*), and *The History of the Latter Han* (*Hou Hanshu*).

73 Writings of the Hundred Schools of Philosophers (*zhuzi baijia shu*) included *The Analects* (*Lunyu*), *The Mencius* (*Mengzi*), *Han Fezi*, and so forth.

74 *Book on the Composition Technique* (*Zhuijing*, Korean: *Ch'ölgyöng*; *Zhuishu*, Korean: *Ch'ölsul*). This was a technique for making astronomical/astrological (*ch'önmun*) calculations in antiquity: one records the location and time of the moon and the five planets morning, evening, and midnight for five years, calculates these, and binds/links them together. The *Zhuijing* was written by Zu Chongzhi, who was a retainer clerk in Nanxuzhou of the Liu-Song dynasty (420–479) during the Chinese northern and southern dynasties period. See *Sui shu* 16: 388 (*lüli shang*); *Sui shu* 19: 518 (*tianwen shang*).

75 *Triple Root Extraction*: the word *kai* (Korean: *-gae*) in *Sankai* (Korean: *Samgae*) refers to finding the root (*süngün*). In Japan, in *The Legal Code of the Taihō Era* (*Taihō ritsuryō*, 710) and *Legal Code of the Yōrō Era* (*Yōrō ritsuryō*, 758), nine texts were used in mathematical instruction. Among these, the book *Triple Root Extraction* appears along with another text titled [*Method of*] *Double Difference* (Japanese: *Sankai jūsa*). *Ritsuryō*, 4, Gakuryō 11; see also Karp and Schubring, *Mathematics Education*, 65.

76 *Mathematical Procedures in Nine Chapters* (*Jiuzhang suanshu*) was compiled primarily in the Han dynasty, but with important later commentaries by Liu Hui (late third century) and others. Although the book was lost, it was recovered from the *Yongle dadian* (Great Compendium of the Yongle reign period) by Dai Zhen (1724–1777). The *Jiuzhang suanshu* contains 246 problems likely to be encountered by government officials and clerks, including the means of calculating the area of fields of various sizes. Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 491. For a full English translation plus the commentary of Liu Hui and the most important Tang commentaries, see Shen et al., *The Nine Chapters of the Mathematical Art*. The text also referred to as *The Nine Procedures* (*Jiushu*) or *The Nine Calculations* (*Jiushu*). On the *Jiuzhang suanshu*, see also Kim and Kim, *Chungguk suhaksa*, 69–113.

77 *Six Categories* [*of Mathematical Methods*]: This appears to be the title of a Chinese math book, which, in the case of Japan, is a composite text including *The Mathematical Procedures in Nine Chapters* (*Jiuzhang suanshu*), *The Book on the Composition Technique* (*Zhui jing*), and *The Triple Root Extraction* (*Sankai*). See *Ritsuryō*, 4, Gakuryō 11.

78 *Samguk sagi*, 38: 380–81 (*kukhak*). Annotated translation by Richard D. McBride II.

Although Silla's state academy was certainly modelled on Tang's imperial academy, a few dissimilarities are worthy of notice. First, the Tang academy was divided into six schools: the school for the sons of the state (*guozixue*), the imperial university (*taixue*), the school of the four gates (*simenxue*), the law school (*lǚxue*), the school of letters (*shuxue*), and the mathematics school (*suanxue*).⁷⁹ The Silla academy had only two: a school for studying Confucian classics and literature and a mathematics school. Second, well-connected Tang youths enjoyed benefits not enjoyed by Silla youths. If a Tang youth's father, grandfather, or paternal great-grandfather held high position, protection privileges (*yin*) could be invoked to get a student into the Tang imperial academy from the early Tang period, and from there he could enter imperial government. Suspiciously, Kim Pusik makes no mention of special privileges enjoyed by scions of Silla's noble families, despite the well-known strictness of Silla's bone-rank system and the deeply entrenched aristocratic structure of Silla society. Third, the Tang academy was for students who did not possess rank, but students in the Silla academy did possess capital ranks. Furthermore, students in the Silla academy could be from age fifteen to thirty and perhaps older if they showed some improvement. A popular interpretation of Silla's state academy has been that it was only for particularly impressive head-rank-six elites.⁸⁰ However, there is no clear evidence supporting that assertion.⁸¹

As previously noted, when in 686 King Sinmun dispatched the first official embassy to Tang since the end of the Silla-Tang conflict, he had his envoy formally request *The Book of Rites* and other writings. In 717, King Sōngdōk dispatched the true-bone noble Kim Such'ung as an emissary to Tang. He was gifted with portraits of Confucius, the ten philosophers, and seventy-two disciples, which were enshrined in the state academy (*t'aehak*).⁸² With the installation of these portraits, Silla could now hold its own commemoration rituals for Confucius (*sōkchon*), suggesting that skills in literary Chinese composition in Silla had improved significantly. This is because the official prayers read and ritually burned during these sacrifices needed to be composed in Chinese according to rigorous standards. Silla epigraphy from the early eighth century, such as the inscription on the gilt-bronze śarīra container excavated from Hwangbok monastery (706 CE) and the inscriptions on the standing stone images of Maitreya and Amitābha at Kamsan monastery (719 CE), provides clear examples of the improved quality of composition in the country when contrasted with earlier, especially sixth-century, epigraphic evidence.

Despite the institution of the state academy in 682, the process of selecting people to serve in government did not change immediately. Although Kim Pusik lays out the various courses of study followed by different students, actual selection for government service was based not only on an individual's birth status but also on his skills in archery. Following a precedent set by Koguryō, the Silla king and officials would observe

⁷⁹ *Xin Tang shu*, 44: 1159–60 (*juxue zhi shang*).

⁸⁰ Lee (Ki-baik), *Silla sasangsa yōn'gu*, 228–29.

⁸¹ See Ju Bodon, *Silla ūi kukhak suyong*, 15–47, esp. 31–34.

⁸² *Samguk sagi*, 8: 101 (Sōngdōk 16).

the archery of prospective individuals and award successful candidates with titles and official rank.⁸³ This did not change until King Wönsöng first instituted the three courses of reading for selecting officials in the spring of 788.⁸⁴ Although Kim Pusik seems to have evaluated the system as innovative, it did not lead to the creation of a bureaucratic class as found in Tang China. Let us examine a few records related to the evaluation of officials:

In the ninth month [of 789], Chaok was appointed as district governor (*sosu*) of Yanggün District. Moch'o, who was a scribe in the chancellery then refuted [the choice], "Since Chaok is not of literati origin, he is not fit to take the regional post." The director (*sijung*) argued, "Even though he is not of literati origin, the man went to Tang to become a student from an early age. Therefore, is he not eligible for such appointment?" The king agreed to this.⁸⁵

This event happened about one year after the initial implementation of the system. Some scholars presume that the phrase "literati origin" (*munjök*) in the above quotation refers to the process of studying and testing in the state academy. Chaok's having studied in the Tang academy was sufficient to earn him a minor post, despite not possessing birth status. Another example is also instructive:

In the eighth month [of 800], the student Yang Yöl, who had been an imperial bodyguard (*sugwi*), was appointed as district governor of Tuhil. Before, when Tang emperor Dezong (r. 779–805 CE) escaped to Fengtian, Yang Yöl followed and gave service to the emperor. For this, the emperor awarded Yang Yöl the title of grand master admonisher of the right (*uch'ansön taebu*) when he returned to his motherland, and the king selected him for this reason.⁸⁶

Ha Il Sik has demonstrated that this account reveals two informative particulars. First, the system of academic evaluation was never strictly enforced. Second, those who studied in China could receive preferential treatment. These facts do not necessarily mean that the "three courses of reading system" was completely nominal or that all individuals who studied in Tang were privileged. These two cases highlight people close to the king, and the posts given were mid-level and low-level posts. People were opposed to Chaok because he did not follow the prescribed curriculum in the state academy. Thus, despite the undeniable fact that it was focused on Chinese learning, it is difficult to conclude that the academic evaluation system of the state academy brought about essential and important transformations in the management of the Silla bureaucratic system because the highest posts were always in the hands of true-bone nobles. Furthermore, all the key

83 See, for instance, *Samguk sagi*, 3: 42 (Silsöng 14); roll 7: 92 (Munmu 17); roll 8: 103 (Söngdök 30).

84 *Samguk sagi*, 10: 115 (Wönsöng 4).

85 *Samguk sagi*, 10: 115–16 (Wönsöng 5); translation following that rendered by John Duncan and Richard D. McBride II in Ha, "Dynastic Crisis," 150–51.

86 *Samguk sagi*, 10: 117–18 (Aejang 1); translation following that rendered by John Duncan and Richard D. McBride II in Ha "Dynastic Crisis," 151.

posts were controlled by the royal Kim family. This was only the plausible culmination of the bone-rank-oriented officialdom.⁸⁷

Conclusion

Silla Korea became an integral part of East Asia from the mid seventh to mid ninth centuries as a result of cultural implementation and modification. This essay has conveyed how Silla was transformed through several overlapping developments in political administration, diplomacy and trade, and education. During the period from 654 to 780 when the lineage of King Muryŏl held power in the state, Silla royalty attempted to check the political privileges and economic power of the hereditary nobility and strengthen autocratic rule through the selective adoption and adaptation of Sinitic approaches to governance and land tenure. After the implementation of several Chinese-style bureaucratic institutions had been completed by 686, Silla rulers projected royal authority through the application of Confucian principles and statutes articulated in the “Royal Regulations” chapter of *The Book of Rites*. Emulating the instructions in this seminal Confucian text, the lords of Silla organized the country into nine prefectures with a system of five sacred mountains, instituted an ancestral temple system, and established a Confucian-oriented education system. By the mid eighth century, however, it had become clear that the ruling family of Silla was unable to break the power of the hereditary true-bone nobility, especially those based in the capital.

Silla fostered close relations with Tang China through diplomacy, trade, and immigration. In the second half of the seventh century and first half of the eighth century, Silla’s principal motivation for tribute relations with Tang was the procurement of Confucian literature and ritual texts and training in Sinitic academic culture, besides the security promised for ritual deference to and participation in the Tang-oriented world. The Silla people reaped benefits from their relationship with Tang on many levels. On the one hand, the Tang emperor recognized Silla as a “land of Confucian gentlemen,” which enhanced Silla’s prestige as one of the notable or at least “more civilized” states in the Sinitic sphere of influence and bolstered the self-image of Silla elites and nobles as contributors to a shared Sinitic culture and worldview. On the other hand, Silla communities were established all along the eastern coast of Tang, and hundreds of Silla students, many of whom were probably head-rank-six elites and lived and studied in Tang, as well as other people of lower social status, such as Chang Pogo, found opportunities for personal advancement in China. Silla’s strategic position in the midst of the Yellow Sea gradually enabled the country to play a substantial role in interregional trade by the middle of the ninth century.

The native *hwarang* system of training nobles and preparing them for service in the Silla government was augmented by the adoption and adaptation of Chinese Confucian learning and the establishment of the state academy in 682. Silla’s state academy was not an exact facsimile of the Tang imperial academy, but at the very least it must have encouraged improvement in writing skills in literary Chinese. A century later, in 788, the

⁸⁷ See Ha, “Dynastic Crisis,” 149–52.

court instituted a programme of three courses of reading for selecting officials, but the highest positions in Silla's government were still reserved for members of the Silla royal family. Although during the mid seventh to mid ninth centuries Silla adopted Confucian practices and symbolism to legitimate royal authority, its kings continued to be fervent adherents of Buddhism.

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Chapter 7

CHINA

Tineke D'Haeseleer

WHEN LI YUAN, posthumously known as Gaozu, proclaimed the Tang dynasty in 618 CE and made himself first emperor of the new dynasty, there was little to indicate that this would become one of the most celebrated dynasties of Chinese history. The Tang would last officially until 907, and the legal and political institutions created during this time, as well as many forms of cultural achievements, would influence the development of East Asian history for centuries to come. Yet, in 618, the only example of a dynasty whose rule spanned many generations and covered a large territory was the Han (206 BCE–220 CE).¹ The Tang's immediate predecessor, the Sui dynasty (581–618 CE) had succeeded in overcoming the territorial disunion which for centuries had split the former Han empire into a northern and southern part, each ruled by a succession of dynasties, which often lasted only a couple of generations. For the rulers and subjects of the newly founded Tang dynasty there was no way to know if this dynasty, too, was to disintegrate in the course of a few decades, or if it would break that cycle. And, throughout the nearly 300 years of the Tang dynasty's lifespan, there were moments of crisis that imperilled the continuity of the ruling house. Nevertheless, the Tang somehow survived multiple moments of danger until its last emperor was forced to abdicate in 907, and is throughout East Asia remembered as a reference point of political power and high culture, which left an enduring influence on Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese states.

The Tang dynasty thus neatly spans the period defined in this volume as “Early Middle Ages,” but this suggests the dynasty was only at the beginning of the Middle Ages as a longer historical period. From East Asian history's point of view, it may better to see the Tang's cultural, economic, social, and political life as the culmination of traditions that developed over centuries from the late third century BCE in the early empire (Qin and Han dynasties, 221 BCE–220 CE) through what is now among China historians sometimes called the “early medieval” period between the Han and Tang.² Furthermore, traditional dynastic divisions mask continuities on all levels, due to the singular focus on the ruling clan, a shortcoming that is also evident when looking towards the end of the Tang and what followed. From the second half of the Tang onwards, the foundations were laid for a transformation of China's economy and society in a period of slow, but significant change. This period is widely known as the Tang–Song transition and has

1 There was a brief interruption in the succession of Han emperors from 9 to 23 CE, when Wang Mang founded the short Xin dynasty, although the territorial unity of the empire remained intact.

2 See, for instance, the *Early Medieval China* journal www.earlymedievalchinagroup.org/journal/, Swartz et al., *Early Medieval China*; Dien, *State and Society*. On the problem of periodization in Chinese history, see Brook, “Medievality.”

long occupied scholars with attempts to pinpoint what exactly entails the changes in state, society, and economy between the ninth century and the eleventh century.³ In fact, the term “Tang–Song transition” in itself is problematic, as it eclipses the half century of political turmoil between the two dynasties that historians are increasingly appreciating as a crucial “in between” period in understanding that transformation. In short, periodization is problematic for Chinese and East Asian history, and fraught with the danger of obfuscating nuances.

But however one wishes to define the period under investigation, it is clear that during these centuries Tang China was firmly integrated into the wider world of Eurasia, in a complex network of trade and political ties, as well as cultural exchanges, all of which had a deep effect on the nature of state and society in China and East Asia in this “early medieval” period. The relations between the Tang empire and the wider world cannot be neatly classified into commercial, economic, military, diplomatic, and cultural aspects, because the closely woven network of interactions built on centuries of earlier contacts, which already integrated these different aspects. Yet, seen over the longer development of Tang’s position in the world, it is possible to discern that the nature of those ties changed significantly during these centuries: the direct involvement of Tang in the wider world, with a military presence in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Korean Peninsula, made way for a more enduring influence as the Chinese written language and technologies of government were adopted and adapted by some neighbouring polities in search of tested and proven methods of state-building.

The Tang in a Nutshell

The Tang court produced systematic records of its activities; scholars also wrote history in a private capacity, about the institutions of the state and their evolution across the dynasties, for instance.⁴ As a result of the vibrant historiographical activity of the Tang period, modern historians can rely on a rich written record to reconstruct the political, cultural, social, and economic history of the Tang. The information gleaned from the archaeological record refines that picture, and in some cases reshapes it. However, much of early and medieval Chinese archaeology is “monumental archaeology,” that is the physical remains of the upper class in the form of tombs of emperors and those who were rich enough to commission the elaborate underground burial chambers that stood the test of time.⁵ The mural paintings frequently found in such tombs inform us about many different aspects of material culture, and the tomb inscriptions (*muzhiming*) which accompanied the burials are instrumental in uncovering a deeper layer of the social history of the Tang elite because these texts contain many details about the deceased’s pedigree, career, and family network. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the findings in Xinjiang have contributed immensely to our understanding of daily life in

3 Luo, “Changes in the Tang–Song.”

4 Twitchett, *Writing of Official History*.

5 Most buildings above ground were wooden constructions and have not survived.

the Tang dynasty, and in classes lower than the top of the elite.⁶ Here the desert climate preserved original objects and documents from the Tang, often in excellent condition. An extraordinary find was the discovery of a niche in a man-made cave in Dunhuang, a site of Buddhist worship in eastern Xinjiang, where in the first years of the eleventh century tens of thousands of documents were locked away and left undisturbed until the early twentieth century.⁷ The manuscripts from the “Library Cave” are so rich and varied that an entire separate field of study has come into existence: Dunhuang studies. Putting all these sources (transmitted, manuscript, and excavated) in dialogue with one another has immensely enriched our understanding of the Tang dynasty. With nearly three centuries of minutely recorded history and a wealth of original primary documents, the Tang dynasty’s history resists an easy summary in a few sentences. This section will only sketch the barest of outlines of the political, economic, and social situation and some major changes.

Immediately after the founding of the dynasty in 618, the territory covered much, but not all, of modern mainland China. It excluded much of the area northeast of Beijing, the provinces of Qinghai and Tibet in the west, and the Western Regions, roughly modern Xinjiang, although the latter were at times integrated into the Tang’s administrative structure. The majority of the population engaged in self-subsistence farming. In the area north of the Huai river, that was wheat; rice was found south of the river, and also in the Sichuan basin in the southwest.⁸ The empire’s population as reflected in the tax registers was mainly located in the northern, grain-growing part. The taxation system of the empire reflected that the economic basis of the empire was the farmer’s household, with taxes paid in kind: grain, cloth, and labour services (*zu yong diao*). The emperor owned all land in theory, and the state gave each adult man between the ages of seventeen and sixty a plot of land of equal size, and a slightly smaller size for the adult women. While there have been doubts that this “Equal Field” system (*jun tian*) ever functioned as intended, the Dunhuang materials show us that the system was implemented in that area with some modifications.⁹ The Tang rulers did not invent this system but inherited it from the Northern Wei’s Xianbei (Sārbi), who ruled northern China from 386 to 534.

A second important institution the Tang borrowed from the Northern Wei was the system of militia units (*fubing*). Each unit consisted of 800 to 1,200 soldiers who remained in service between the age of twenty and sixty.¹⁰ The soldiers and their families engaged in agriculture, provided their own supplies, and trained during the winter and autumn, when agricultural duties were minimal. These soldiers formed a highly trained and experienced military force. In case of need, additional troops could be mobilized and trained from the regular population, too, for instance for punitive expeditions

6 For the geographic location of the most important regions and places mentioned in this chapter, see Map 17.

7 See, for instance, Hansen, *Silk Road*, 167–98.

8 Lewis, *Cosmopolitan Empire*, 5–21.

9 Twitchett, “Financial Administration,” 1–9.

10 Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires*, 761.

into foreign territories, or to defend against invasions. By the end of the seventh century, large standing permanent armies were established at key strategic frontiers, but the militia units remained in existence into the 730s. With the soldiers producing their own food and providing their own kit, the central treasury was relieved of a large financial burden. The units were located across the entire empire, with a stronger concentration near the capital Chang'an (modern Xi'an), as their main task was initially to protect new dynasty and its centre of power.¹¹

In addition to the military, an extensive civil service assisted the Tang rulers. There were more than 300 prefectures, which oversaw more than 1,500 counties in total. Prefects and county magistrates maintained tax registers, collected taxes, and enforced the law. Officials were not allowed to serve in their native prefecture, and they were transferred regularly to prevent them from building up local loyalties and power that could be used against the state.¹² Positions in the local administration were seen as undesirable, even though a prefect held a relatively high position in the ranking system.¹³ The highest government positions were in the three departments and six ministries, which were the central secretariat (*zhongshu sheng*), the chancellery (*menxia sheng*), and the department of state affairs (*shangshu sheng*). The chancellery advised the emperor and the central secretariat, but the real power lay with the secretariat, which formulated policy. The department of state affairs was the executive organ, and controlled the six ministries: rites, personnel, war, punishment, revenue, and works. This basic structure remained the same throughout the dynasty. Scholar-officials who shared a cultural background in the studies of the Confucian classics, and an ethos of loyalty to the state and dynasty, staffed the vast bureaucracy. The ability to read and write complex and formal literary Chinese was essential to advancement for these officials, and few but the elite class could afford the time to master the written language and required corpus, which took years of intensive study. That immediately limited upward social mobility through the civil service to a small part of the population, but also created a specific shared identity among those who did qualify for these positions. Although examinations began to play a role in the selection process towards the end of the dynasty, the majority of officials were appointed because their families were already part of the elite stratum.

The court was based in Chang'an, a planned city built during the preceding Sui dynasty and adapted from a layout described in *The Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li*).¹⁴ The walls formed an almost square rectangle, each side more than 7 kilometres long. Eleven north-south avenues, and fourteen east-west streets divided the inside of the city in a grid pattern, with more than 100 residential wards, two markets (each the size of two wards), and in the central northern part a large section for offices of the central government and the imperial palace. A second imperial palace protruded from the northern

¹¹ Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 190–92.

¹² Lewis, *Cosmopolitan Empire*, 72–73.

¹³ Herbert, "Provincial Officialdom," 29. For more information on the system of rankings in Tang bureaucracy, see Herbert, *Examine the Honest*, 9–15.

¹⁴ *Zhou li Dongguan Kaogongji*, 72. See also Xiong, "Planning of Daxingcheng," 67.

wall, breaking the geometric form. The central north–south axis was the Vermilion Bird Road (*Zhuque dajie*), which was 155 metres wide, and lined with trees, with ditches on either side separating the central road for exclusive imperial use from the roads for the civilians' use. Even the narrower roads were still forty paces wide, and this gave the city a spacious feel, further enhanced by the orchards and vegetable plots found in some of the wards, in particular in the less populated southern part of the city. At the east market one could buy the finest goods to be found in the Tang empire; the merchants at the west market provided a wider array of goods, aimed at a wider clientele, but this market was most famous for the sale of foreign imports. Foreigners lived in or near the west market, and in this part of the city one also found Zoroastrian and Nestorian temples. Chang'an was not only the political centre of the empire, it was also an important hub in the long-distance trade in luxury goods with Central Asia. All the wards, including the markets, were walled, with gates on each side, and a curfew was maintained from sundown to sunrise throughout the city.¹⁵

A secondary capital was located in Luoyang (Henan), further east on the Yellow River. It was not as imposing a location as Chang'an, but it had a similar grid pattern for residential wards, and, in recognition of its commercial nature, three markets.¹⁶ Luoyang was better situated for access to the main food-production areas in the lower Yellow River area and in the lower Yangzi region. This was further enhanced with a network of canals which the Tang inherited from the Sui. In the first half of the dynasty, the court was periodically relocated to Luoyang in times of food shortages, and the city retained its importance as an *entrepôt* in the second half. In addition to the two capitals there were other major commercial hubs, connecting trade routes throughout the empire, and with the outside world. Panyu (modern Guangzhou) in the far south was an important city for trade with South and Southeast Asia, and had a small community of Muslim traders. Yangzhou on the Yangzi river delta was another dynamic city, maintaining commercial contacts with Japan and the Korean Peninsula. The city of Chengdu, in modern Sichuan province, was another key commercial point in the Tang's domestic and international trading network.

Within the core territory, Tang people felt there was a significant cultural divide between the areas north and south of the Yangzi river. This was the result of divergent political development between north and south. Northern nomadic non-Han groups invaded and ruled the north from the early years of the fourth century onwards, while the south came under control of Han émigrés who had fled before the invaders.¹⁷ There also was a split between the northwestern and northeastern core territory. East of the Taihang mountains were the plains of modern Henan and Shandong provinces and the southern part of modern Hebei. This area was collectively known as the land east of the mountains (*Shandong*). West of the mountains, roughly equivalent to the modern province Shaanxi, was named the land inside the pass (*Guanzhong*), that is west of the

15 Heng, *Cities of Aristocrats*, 17–28.

16 Heng, *Cities of Aristocrats*, 30–31.

17 Swartz et al., *Early Medieval China*, 11–16.

Tong Pass (*Tongguan*), where the Yellow River's course bends 90 degrees to the east through the mountain range. The elite families in both regions were rivals for power and prestige at the national level. Members of the Shandong elite saw themselves as the guardians of the classicist tradition and boasted of pedigrees and family lines which connected them to Han dynasty—both in line of descent and in transmission of scholarship and interpretation of the classics. On the other side were the Guanzhong clans, with a more limited focus on scholarship but a strong martial ethos and influenced by many years of intermarrying with Turkic groups. The latter included the Sui and Tang imperial families, and their closest supporters. The first generations of Tang emperors, like their Sui predecessors, were equally at home in the traditions of the steppe and the Turkic language as they were at court upholding the ideals of Confucian statecraft with their Han Chinese advisers.¹⁸ The Shandong clans looked down on those from Guanzhong as social upstarts, and four of the most prominent Shandong clans would not even marry with the imperial clan.¹⁹ But despite these rivalries, court politics were not consumed by intense rivalries or factionalism based on geographical divisions.²⁰

That is not to say the Tang court was free from drama. The second emperor Taizong came to power through fratricide;²¹ one of his concubines became the empress of his son, a scandalous event in itself, but only the beginning of Wu Zhao's meteoric rise to power. After her husband was incapacitated, probably through a stroke, Wu ruled in his stead, and then stayed in power as a regent over her sons. In 690, she discarded all pretence and proclaimed herself emperor (*huangdi*), and proclaimed her own dynasty: the Zhou.²² The Li house of the Tang dynasty was nominally restored to power in 705, but it was not until the reign of Xuanzong (r. 713–756 CE) that the Tang house returned to its full glory. In 742, at the empire's peak of power, a state-wide census revealed approximately 8.5 million households (almost 49 million individuals) were registered.²³ At the same time, Tang armies expanded the territorial boundaries with renewed vigour, in particular westward. In 751, Tang troops engaged Muslim soldiers of the new 'Abbāsīd empire in a battle at Talas, deep in Central Asia. But both sides were too far removed from their home base, and neither was able to press for advantage. The battle was the first direct military confrontation between China and the Muslim world, yet historians at the time did not imbue it with any special significance.²⁴ In particular on the Tang's side, domestic events a few years later were far more consequential.

In the final months of 755, the frontier general An Lushan, of Turkish-Sogdian origin, rose in rebellion against the Tang court and marched with the majority of his

18 Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*.

19 Johnson, *Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*.

20 Wechsler, "Factionalism."

21 Eisenberg, *Kingship*, 167–94.

22 The title *Huangdi* was only used for male occupants of the throne. Wu Zhao broke with tradition and transcended gender boundaries by taking the title.

23 Twitchett, "Hsüan-Tsung," 419.

24 Twitchett, "Introduction," 36.

90,000 troops from the northeastern area around modern Beijing to the centre of the empire: first to Luoyang; then, in 756, he was able to break through the defences at the Tong Pass. Emperor Xuanzong and a very small retinue fled to the safety of Sichuan, and he abdicated before long. His son, Emperor Suzong, led the restoration, and managed to stabilize the situation by 763, but not without making great concessions to the rebels. Once the major leaders of the rebellion were killed (often by their own men), many of the more junior leaders were allowed to stay in the territory they now occupied, and appointed as military governors.²⁵ They were autonomous in all but name: the soldiers here chose their own military governors, with the court merely rubberstamping the decisions; taxes collected in these areas were not forwarded to the central treasury; and the soldiers under the military governors were loyal to their governor, not the central government or the emperor.

The rebellion can be seen in many ways as a major turning point in the history of the Tang. The Western Regions were lost, as the armies were withdrawn to assist the loyalist troops in the core territory; Tang armies never recovered them. The system of local government changed as military governors became a new layer of regional government, inserted above the prefectures and counties which previously were directly controlled by the central government. But most importantly, because the northeastern part of the empire remained autonomous until the end of the Tang dynasty, the court also lost one of its most important areas of revenue: the fertile plains of the Hebei region. In response, the search for new sources of revenue led to taxation on merchants, in particular salt production and sales, and a reform of the tax system in 780 acknowledged that the “equal field” system was no longer able to cope with the evolving situation in land-tenure patterns.²⁶ Because many northerners had fled during the turmoil of the rebellion to the south, the demographic distribution of the empire shifted. For the first time in Chinese history, the southern part was now more populous than the northern. The private administrations of the autonomous military governors opened up new avenues for social advancement for young, educated men; and the increasing prestige of the examination degrees began to change slowly the social fabric of the empire, but holding an official post remained one of the most important markers of social standing.²⁷ To which degree these changes were initiated by the rebellion of An Lushan, or were simply evolutions within the system precipitated by the rebellion is hard to determine.

It is easy to portray the second half of the Tang as a dynasty limping along until its demise in 907; after all, it is hard to point to a single ruler who seemed to have as much impact as Taizong had in stabilizing the early Tang, or Xuanzong in patronizing the arts and ruling an ever-expanding empire. Yet the second half of the Tang was a dynamic intellectual and political period when scholar-officials at court and in private circles discussed extensively the problems that plagued the empire, great art and literature

25 Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 228.

26 Twitchett, “Financial Administration,” 34–40, 50–65.

27 However, the families who dominated the political scene in the early years of the dynasty continued to monopolize the top-level jobs in the central government. See Tackett, *Destruction*, chap. 3.

was produced, and the Tang still received embassies from neighbouring polities, whose leaders were keen to maintain official ties with the ruling house. Furthermore, the central government had regained control over significant parts of its territory by the early ninth century.²⁸ It was another rebellion in the late ninth century that signalled the beginning of the end for the Tang. Between 878 and 880, Huang Chao and his rebel army ravaged the Tang southern provinces, and various port cities along the coast, before turning to the Yangzi river delta and eventually moving into the northern heartland and the corridor between the two capitals. The inability of the central government to put down this rebellion opened up the way for various warlords to stake out their territories, and with the central authority of the Tang court gone, it was only a matter of time before one of the warlords proclaimed himself as emperor of a new, rival dynasty.

Tang Worldview

Just as Tang China's connections with the outside world were many and multifarious, and changed considerably throughout the 300 years of the dynasty's existence, the territory controlled by the Tang rulers also fluctuated during that period. Tang emperors brought peace and political stability after centuries of division between northern and southern China, and this created opportunities for territorial expansion during the first half of the dynasty, characterized with a confident tone in its foreign relations. This fit with the traditional Chinese worldview, in which the world consisted of five or nine zones (depending on the canonical text one follows), arranged in concentric circles or nested squares.²⁹ The emperor was the son of Heaven, and he had been given the mandate of Heaven to rule over the "All under Heaven" (*tianxia*) or the known world. He was located in the centre of those zones, and spread his beneficent, civilizing influence throughout the world. The zones further removed from the centre received less of that influence, just like the heat and light from a fire decrease as the distance to the source increases. The emperor's virtue or charismatic power (*de*) was the force that held this system together. When this power was strong, people from distant areas would be attracted to the cultural and moral superiority of this centre, and present tribute of local goods. When it was weak, more distant areas would not be attracted to the court or visited less often. Therefore, the frequency of visits from foreign parts, and the distance travelled to reach the court were considered indicative of the ruler's power, and the arrival of envoys from more distant parts of the known world was generally interpreted as a good omen. Foreign-policy discussions at the Tang court often included exhortations to the emperor to cultivate (*xiu*) his virtue, so as to activate that transformative influence. We should not understand this as an early understanding of "soft power," for the Chinese courts did not engage in active promotion of their cultural values or achievements and thought it rather self-evident that their culture was far superior to that of its near and distant neighbours.

28 Peterson, "Court and Province," 537.

29 Di Cosmo, *China and Its Enemies*, 94–95.

This worldview permeates the source materials that we use for the history of Tang's foreign relations because records produced at the Tang court are by far the largest body of material at our disposal. Archival materials that lay at the basis of the two official standard histories, the *Old* and *New History of the Tang* (*Jiu, Xin Tangshu*) were curated at the Tang court.³⁰ The final versions of these standard histories were produced after the fall of the Tang dynasty in 945 and 1060 respectively,³¹ but those later compilers shared this worldview with their Tang predecessors. Thus, the resulting texts present foreign relations in a language that emphasizes the superior position of the emperor, the court and "China" (*huaxia*) as a whole. Official delegations from foreign rulers for instance were said to "bring tribute goods to the court" (*chao gong*), and its leaders were granted official titles by the emperor, which to Tang rulers and officials indicated their status as vassals or subjects (*chen*). Nevertheless, the Tang bureaucratic system bequeathed us a remarkably detailed record of interactions with the wider world, when written sources from Tang China's neighbours are extremely rare and fragmented.

Pre-modern Chinese historians considered their culture the pinnacle of civilization, but they also valued accuracy in their reporting. Every Tang scholar-official was familiar with the ancient story of the historians who had given their lives to present a faithful record of Cui Zhu's murder of his lord in 548 BCE. Cui killed two historians, but he relented when a third stepped forward; meanwhile, another historian from a different state had already set out on a journey to verify the information and record it, but returned once he heard the event had been entered into the history documents.³² Tang historians were generally not tested to such extremes, but the story illustrates the ideal standard to which they held their craft. If used with some caution, the official histories provide useful and reliable information despite an engrained editorial bias in the representation of foreigners in these texts.³³ The ego-centred worldview of the Tang scholar-officials was not unique, as many other pre-modern societies displayed a similar attitude in their relation to the outside world. What is remarkable, though, is how the China-centred worldview retained its importance in foreign-policy debates, despite observations and experiences that pointed to a discrepancy between that theory and reality. One of the ways in which Tang historians solved this problem was by creating a pedigree for new foreign peoples who appeared on the Tang state's borders, which connected them with known and named older groups. In this way, the threat posed by those newcomers could be contained because they were in fact nothing more than a reincarnation of old adversaries, who had in the end submitted to the Chinese rulers.³⁴

Relations with foreign entities at the highest and most formal level were conducted through the court for diplomatic reception (*honglusi*), a department in the ministry of

30 Twitchett, *Writing of Official History*.

31 Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 694.

32 *Zuozhuan*, Duke Xiang, 25th year.

33 But see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 344–45, for problems of statistics in military engagements.

34 See Cosmo, *China and Its Enemies*, 298–99, for an example of this technique for Han dynasty descriptions of the Xiongnu.

rites (*libu*). There was no “foreign office,” because these relations with foreign envoys and delegations were simply considered an extension of the relations between the court and the provinces, and not between heads of state as equals. These delegations were housed in the capital in designated guest houses, and all expenses they incurred from the moment they entered the border were covered by the central government. While the delegates waited to hear if they were to be received in an audience with the emperor, officials from the department for defence (*zhifang bu*), a division under the ministry of military affairs, visited them to interrogate them about geography, cultural practices, political developments, and military matters in their home country. These officials created the equivalent of a “country brief” or short intelligence report, to ensure the court was up to date on the situation in neighbouring countries. Those reports formed the basis of the dedicated accounts on foreigners in the *Old and New History of the Tang*, often the starting point for modern historians’ research.³⁵ This also means that historians need to observe certain caveats and should not mistake the apparent accuracy of these records for objectivity. Although for a long time the written record dominated the scholarship, these biases are now more readily acknowledged. In addition, archaeology and epigraphy, and new interpretations of a wide variety of written materials, can be used to counter the (often unconscious) bias against foreigners that found its way into the Tang official records.

The reception of foreign envoys by the emperor was carefully staged to impress upon the visitors of the power and authority of the son of Heaven. Diplomatic letters (*guoshu*) from the heads of state were exchanged, at least as long as the language was sufficiently respectful, and the foreign leader presented him- or herself in the inferior position. For instance, during the Sui dynasty, the empress of Japan had provoked the ire of the Sui emperor, when she opened her letter with the words: “The child of Heaven³⁶ of the place where the sun rises writes to the child of Heaven of the place where the sun sets.”³⁷ Such language suggested the equality of both rulers, a view which was wholly inappropriate at the Sui court, and the emperor instructed the court for diplomatic reception not to give an audience to foreigners whose letters did not conform to the requirements. But if the letters were successfully exchanged, the visit would also include an exchange of ritual gifts; the visitors’ tributary goods consisted of rare items produced in their locality, and in exchange the emperor granted them goods that often surpassed many times the value of the received goods. This was not a commercial but a ritual-political exchange. The rare and valuable goods brought to the capital, sometimes including live animals or people, symbolized the emperor’s power to attract people from all over the world with the creation of a microcosm at the capital, and thus confirmed his position at the centre of the known world.³⁸ In addition to material goods, the emperor usually

³⁵ Twitchett, *Writing of Official History*, 27; *Tang Huiyao*, 63, 1089–90.

³⁶ *Tianzi* is usually translated as “son of Heaven” because the title was only used by male rulers in China, but in Japan women could hold the highest title.

³⁷ *Suishu*, 81, 1827.

³⁸ Schafer’s study of foreign material culture in Tang China, *Golden Peaches*, gives a good indication of the variety of such tributary goods, although it also covers goods that made their way into Tang China in other manners.

bestowed a title and honorary office on the foreign ruler. Such titles were coveted, as recognition from one of the most powerful rulers in East Asia boosted the status of the recipient in his or her home country. In theory, engaging in this hierarchical relationship also entailed duties of mutual assistance for both parties: as the senior partner, the Tang emperor had the duty to protect his vassals, and as the inferior party, the foreign rulers had to assist their lord when requested. In practice, Tang forces were rarely sent out to protect a vassal in times of need, and only if such action aligned with the wider Tang strategic interests, as we shall see in later sections. The assistance of foreign armies in Tang conquests, however, was relatively common in the first half of the dynasty because with such actions they could prove their loyalty to the Tang regime.³⁹ At least, such was the theory. In practice, there were many variations on this theme, and even in the first half of the dynasty Tang emperors were not always successful in making relations with the outside world conform to this format. It was only through a fortuitous combination of circumstances, military campaigns, and aggressive diplomacy that foreign relations in the first half of the Tang period vaguely resembled the neat theoretical worldview.

In addition to these official contacts, which are the best documented, sources provide glimpses of other types of cultural exchanges. Merchants traded with distant countries, and it appears that Tang producers responded to demands of foreign markets. In 1998, a shipwreck was discovered off the coast of Belitung in Indonesia, and it provides tangible proof of direct trade between Tang China and West Asia. The ship, similar to an Arab *dhow*, sank around 830, and contained a cargo of Tang goods: various types of glazed ceramics, including many with motifs that would appeal to the Muslim buyers in West Asia; spices such as anis; bronze mirrors; and gold and silver dishes and cups.⁴⁰ In addition to the sea route, there were also overland long-distance trade routes. Monks and merchants⁴¹ travelled across state boundaries pursuing religious goals and trade opportunities.⁴² The Buddhist monk Xuanzang, for instance, provided a detailed record of the route to Central Asia.⁴³

In the next section, I will present in more detail a selection of specific cases and not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of Tang rulers' engagement with the wider world. The Eastern Türks are representative of patterns in Chinese-nomadic relations; the Western Regions allow an exploration of the phenomenon of the "silk road" and how new insights in archaeology and manuscript studies are changing our perception of long-distance trade. Koguryō and Parhae serve as contrasting cases of neighbours who adopted Chinese culture and state-building techniques. Their different fates in engaging with the Tang also show the changing nature of Tang's relations with the wider world.

39 Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 188–89.

40 Worrall, *Tang Treasures*.

41 Juliano, *Monks and Merchants*.

42 See also Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*.

43 Xuanzang, *Da Tang Xiyu ji*.

Tang and the World

Eastern Türks

The northern frontier was the main concern in foreign relations for the young Tang dynasty. The Eastern Türks lived in the steppe lands north of the Guanzhong region, without a clear natural boundary separating them from the political centre of the Tang empire. In the sixth century, before the founding of the Tang, the Türks had exploited the political divisions of northern China by supporting one or another of the contending regimes. There was a brief interruption during the Sui dynasty, which reunited northern and southern China in 589, but that was reversed during the civil wars following the fall of the Sui in 617. The Türk qaghan was able to influence the politics of the Central Plain by changing his support between the multiple contenders to succeed the Sui. By extension, the qaghan increased his prestige and influence among Central Asian peoples. Gaozu, the first Tang emperor, was one of those who received support from the Türk qaghan in the early stage of his uprising against the Sui.⁴⁴

It was not until 624 that the Tang armies succeeded in eliminating the last of the contenders for the throne. During this period, the Türk qaghan retained his ability to put pressure on Gaozu. Türk envoys behaved arrogantly when visiting the court, and periodically bands of Türks invaded the northern frontier regions.⁴⁵ With resistance against the Tang still flaring up occasionally in some parts of his territory, Gaozu did not have many extra resources to confront the Türks, and he was forced to act as the lower-ranked partner in relations with his northern neighbours. This went against the traditional, hierarchical China-centred worldview, in which the Chinese emperor always occupied the higher position.

This situation continued in the early years of the reign of the second emperor Taizong (626–649 CE). A few weeks after Taizong came to the throne in 626, a party of Türk raiders made it all the way to the outskirts of the capital near the Bian bridge over the Wei river, which flowed north of the capital Chang'an. In a daring strategic gamble, Taizong solved the "incident at the Bian bridge" by riding out in person, accompanied by a small retinue, and engaged Illig Qaghan in a parley, separated by the Wei river. Taizong reasoned, according to Chinese sources, that the Türks would interpret this move—in which he was unprotected against the Turkic forces—as a sign of strength and confidence rather than being intimidated into submission. Taizong also arranged for some elite garrisons in the capital to march out and parade in full view of the Türk qaghan at this point. The Chinese sources suggest that the tables were now turned, with the Türks intimidated and withdrawing. Andrew Graff suggests that this piece of bluff and theatre was also accompanied with a handsome payment to the invaders.⁴⁶ However, the traditional historians' and Graff's interpretation both point to an important aspect of the early Tang–Türk diplomacy, which has also been highlighted by Jonathan Skaff: the

⁴⁴ *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a, 5153.

⁴⁵ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 43.

⁴⁶ Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 186; *Zizhi tongjian*, 191: 6132.

early Tang rulers were well versed in Central Asian symbolism and its mechanisms of power. The imperial clan was a part of the northwestern elite, which had in the period preceding the founding of the Tang freely mingled and intermarried with the non-Han rulers of northern China. Equally versed in the civil arts of calligraphy and poetry as in the martial skills of horse riding and archery, Taizong exemplified a balance between the Central Asian and Chinese traditions.⁴⁷ The early Tang emperors understood the need for a ruler to be seen as charismatic, leading in person, and taking part in battle, because his authority was directly related to his martial prowess. They also understood that a leader's ability to appropriate and distribute goods, and in particular luxury goods, among the subordinate leaders was very important, as was the granting of specific objects that symbolized such a hierarchical relationship.⁴⁸ Taizong's actions at the Bian bridge can therefore be seen as emphasizing his position as a daring warrior and competent leader.

A few years after the incident at the Bian bridge, the Eastern Turkic empire collapsed, and they lost their superior position in the steppe, while Taizong was proclaimed the highest esteemed leader in Central Asia when he accepted the title of "Heavenly Qaghan." This was not the result of Taizong's clever strategizing but rather a fortuitous confluence of circumstances: the Eastern Turkic empire had been collapsing from the inside. If the Türks were paid off in the Bian bridge incident in 626, then at least in theory these gifts should have provided Illig Qaghan with sufficient means to reward his subordinates, thus reinforcing his position. However, David Graff suggests that Taizong's actions forestalled any further easy access to goods from the Tang through simple extortion, and this may have contributed to internal disputes among the Eastern Turkic confederation.⁴⁹ The histories also record other factors. In the winter following the Bian bridge incident, severe weather killed off much of the livestock on the steppe, leading to famine and unrest among the subordinate tribes in the following months. Illig Qaghan also was faced with a contender for power around the same time. Among many other Central Asian peoples leadership was passed from older to younger brother, and the Türks were no exception. When the youngest brother came to power, the question inevitably arose if in the next generation the title should go to the son of the oldest sibling, or the son of the current leader. Illig Qaghan had succeeded his older brother, but his nephew Tuli, the son of that previous leader, was now of age. In an attempt to exploit the unrest, Tuli asked the Tang for assistance, while the Türk confederacy crumbled and reverted back to its smaller constituent units of family units. Taizong used this moment to send his armies in 629 and 630 out to the steppe, where they dealt the final blow to what remained of the Eastern Turkic empire with speedy military actions under the inspired leadership of two of the early Tang's most successful generals.⁵⁰

47 Chen, *Tang dai zheng zhi shi*.

48 Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*.

49 Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 186.

50 Wang (Zhenping), *Multi-polar Asia*, 32–34; Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 187–88.

With the collapse of the qaghanate in 630, the problem of the Eastern Türks did not simply disappear. Many of these people now submitted to the Tang emperor, and this led to intense debates at the court. How should these people be integrated into the fabric of the empire, if at all? These debates laid bare deep divisions of opinions between the civil officials, military officials, and the emperor. The sources present us with stylized versions of the debates, but they are based on historical documents, including written petitions and memorials from the participants. Shao-Yun Yang analysed these debates with an emphasis on the rhetorical aspects, and he sees the speeches from the different participants as persuasions towards a desired outcome rather than expressions of deeply held beliefs.⁵¹ However, the ideas expressed in these rhetorical pieces reveal the kinds of biases and stereotypes that held persuasive power, and these debates illuminate more general ideas that held currency in the Tang intellectual and political world. A trope such as the lack of reliability of the Türks could indeed be used for or against an inclusionist policy, but the basic premise, that these foreign peoples were untrustworthy, held persuasive power for many.

The question of the Türks was a particularly pressing one because of their proximity to Chang'an: the capital region was not protected along the northern frontier by any topographical feature that could be easily defended against invaders. One of the suggestions for dealing with the surrendered Türks was to break up the larger clans into their smaller family units and relocate them in counties and prefectures throughout the northern Tang territory with a lower population density. Under the recently established equal-field system, they would be given a set amount of land, like other Tang subjects, and farm for a living. The Türks would become indistinguishable from Han Chinese farmers in a few generations, and the northern frontier would be emptied of the Tang enemies. A second option was to leave the Türks in the area where they currently were, in the Ordos plateau south of the great northern bend of the Yellow River. Without a strong leader to unify them, Tang scholar-officials felt that these Türks no longer posed a threat to the Tang, and could be kept under control easily. A third option was forcible migration, to resettle them north of the Yellow River and far out of reach of the Tang capital region.⁵²

There were practical and ideological problems for all three approaches. Some Tang officials simply did not believe it was possible to assimilate the Türks. In the court debate transmitted in the historical records, Wei Zheng (580–643 CE) was the most outspoken on this issue. He suggested that because the Türks' basic nature was immutable, any policy that brought them close to or right into the heart of the empire would only have the effect of bringing these dangerous enemies closer to their target, and he did not think turning them into farmers was likely to succeed.⁵³ Others suggested that the Türks could be used to create a defensive perimeter against other Central Asian peoples. The strategy of "using barbarians to control barbarians" (*yi yi zhi yi*) had already been

51 Yang, "Reinventing the Barbarian," 58.

52 Yang, "Reinventing the Barbarian," 57–59.

53 *Zizhi tongjian*, 193: 6187–88.

practised during the Han period, and turning former enemies into auxiliaries or allies to defend the borders was a strategy fruitfully exploited by the Romans as well.⁵⁴ While General Dou Jing (d. 635 CE) saw this particular strategy as the only solution to put these “barbarians” to some good use, Wen Yanbo (575–637 CE) had a more generous view and felt that “Settling [the Türks] south of the river is what is called reviving them after their death and preserving them after their destruction. They will cherish your great generosity and to the end they will not rebel.”⁵⁵ Therefore, Wen Yanbo suggested to settle the Türks in the Ordos region, south of the big bend in the Yellow River. Some advisers worried that the fickle nature of the Türks would lead to the same problem as in the first suggestion, namely bringing the enemy straight into the core of the empire. Although the Türks had submitted to the Tang, critics like Wei Zheng saw this as an opportunistic move in the wake of the civil disorder and famine on the steppe, and argued that it was only a matter of time before the tribes would turn their backs on the Tang emperor and return to their old custom of plundering the border region instead of acting like a protective screen against other nomads.⁵⁶ Because the assimilation plan and the plan to employ the Türks as frontier defence brought them too close to the capital, Wei Zheng suggested that they should be made to return to their home territory north of the Gobi desert. But what Wei Zheng, and perhaps others, did not realize, was that doing so would bring the weakened Türk tribes under the sphere of influence of the Xueyantuo, a group of Tiele tribes who lived further to the northwest. They had assisted the Tang in the defeat of Illig Qaghan of the Eastern Türks, but subsequently expanded their influence over the qaghan’s former territory.

The scenarios proposed by most Tang scholar-officials suggest that the dynamics of steppe politics and interactions between steppe peoples were largely unknown or mysterious to them,⁵⁷ perhaps with the exception of Wen Yanbo, who had spent some years among them as their prisoner. They thought that simply removing the Türks from the frontier region would empty that area of its enemies and leave the vast lands beyond the frontier empty without further threats to Tang territory. In reality, these lands would soon attract other nomadic groups due to their suitability as pasture lands. The pastoral nomads of central and inner Asia along the Tang’s northern frontier were part of a vast network of such groups, and due to the pressure on resources good pasture lands would not lay unclaimed for long. Furthermore, power dynamics on the steppe fluctuated as a result of interactions with different states and tribes, including many beyond the reach of the Tang empire. Nevertheless, Tang officials often kept seeing the northern pastoralists in a simple, bi-lateral relationship.⁵⁸ Such a simplistic view of affairs had also informed the debates at the Han court (206 BCE–220 CE) on how best to deal with the Xiongnu, a

54 See, for instance Tacitus, *Agricola*, 33.

55 *Zhenguan zhengyao*, 499.

56 *Zhenguan zhengyao*, 499.

57 Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 56.

58 Di Cosmo, “Inner Asian Nomads,” shows how the early nomads maintained multiple and complex relations with various sedentary groups as well as fellow nomads. There is no reason to assume that such complexity had disappeared by the Tang dynasty.

northern people very similar to the Türks in culture, political organization, and economy. That historical experience informed Tang scholar-officials' views and methods of debate, with the result that they employed the same tropes, marshalling the Han experience to prove the wisdom of one policy over another, and they were most unwilling to engage with these people as equals. On the other hand, Emperor Taizong is often portrayed as more inclusive, humane, and cosmopolitan in outlook than his advisers in his dealings with the Eastern Türks. In reality, this may be simply due to his keener insight in the power dynamics of the steppe world, and a better understanding of how he could exploit inherent weaknesses in the system, in particular when a steppe confederation was thrown into a crisis of succession or placed under severe economic pressure.

In the end, Taizong settled the debate by following Wen Yanbo's suggestion. He split up the supra-tribal and tribal groupings and created local administrative divisions for the surrendered Türks. They were resettled in special divisions named "loose rein" or "loose bridle" governments and prefectures (*jimi fuzhou*). Their leaders were appointed as the prefects, but in contrast to the mainstream Chinese local administration, the position of prefect was hereditary, similar to the tribal leadership. Tribes were allowed to live according to their own customs and traditions in these special prefectures. The term *jimi* was most famously used in Ban Gu's (32–92 CE) discussion on frontier defence in the *Hanshu*, where he concluded that to "keep [the barbarians] under loose rein without severing [the relationship] (*jimi bu jue*), and cause the blame to be on them, this was probably the constant method of the sage kings in controlling and guarding against the Man and Yi."⁵⁹ The term *jimi fuzhou* was an invention of the Tang dynasty, but the concept of such indirect rule had existed as early as the Han dynasty. In essence, this created a flexible hybrid administrative unit. The peculiarities of the *jimi fuzhou* allowed groups with very different economic, social, and political organizations to be integrated into the regular Tang local administrative framework, and the Türks were not the only surrendered or conquered groups settled in *jimi fuzhou*.

The *jimi fuzhou* rarely provided a permanent solution to the problems on the frontier. Over time, the inhabitants of many of these prefectures tried to regain their independence, in particular when Tang central authority seemed on the wane, such as during the Zhou interregnum at the end of the seventh century, and after the rebellion of An Lushan in 755. Nevertheless, the creation of these "loose rein" prefectures for the Eastern Türks was an important precedent in managing relations with other non-Han groups.

The Western Regions

The Eastern Türks presented the first major obstacle in Tang foreign relations, and the debates at court about the policy are relatively well documented. This makes it into a useful touch stone for later developments in the management of relations with foreign groups, since the principles expressed for governing the Türks were not always applied in other cases that on the surface appeared to be similar, such as the Western Regions (*Xiyu*), or some aspects of the Tang–Koguryō relationship.

⁵⁹ *Xin Tangshu*, 43b: 1119.

The *jimi fuzhou* system was also contemplated in the next large military success under Taizong's rule: the subjugation of the city-states of the Western Regions. This area was vital to the trade between Tang China and the rest of Eurasia. The so-called "silk roads" ran through the city-states centred on the oases strung around the Taklamakan desert, situated to the northwest of the Tang empire, in present-day Xinjiang province.⁶⁰ Although best known as a key region for these trade routes, the Western Regions were also of strategic concern for the Tang empire. The small city-states were not united under a single leader but instead found themselves during the seventh and eighth century often cooperating, or dominated by various larger polities, such as Türks, Tang, Tibetans, and Uyghur. Whoever controlled the oasis cities also controlled the flow of the trade of luxury goods on the long-distance trade routes and the additional revenue, as well as an important frontier of the Tang empire.

The city-states centred around the oases had a long history of interaction with the Chinese world. Trade contacts can be traced to the Neolithic period and the Shang dynasty, with jade from Khotan found in tombs in northeastern and central China.⁶¹ The armies of emperor Wu of Han (141–87 BCE) conquered the Western Regions, the first time a regime based in the Central Plain reached far into Central Asia. That control was relinquished in the early years of the second century. Culturally, the region remained very different from China, and the Tang conquerors were confronted with languages and scripts very different from their own. The Sogdian script, for instance, was derived from Aramaic via Syriac, and in some areas Indo-European influences can be detected in culture and language.⁶² The Western Regions were also the main conduit for the introduction of Buddhism into China, as early as the first century, and the religion was widely practised in the various kingdoms when the Buddhist monk Faxian travelled through them on his way to India in the early fifth century.⁶³ Xuanzang, another Buddhist pilgrim-monk, encountered a similar situation in the mid seventh century, right before the Tang conquest.⁶⁴

The Tang's expansion in 630 into the area dominated by the Eastern Turkic empire created a domino effect among the small oasis-states. The heads of these states either desperately tried to defend their independence against the Tang, or they voluntarily submitted in the face of the relentless advance of the Tang armies. The sequence of events was set in motion when the city-state named Hami (Chinese: Yiwu), located closest to the Tang, submitted in the wake of the Eastern Türks' defeat. Hami thus became the Xiyi (western Yi) prefecture. This expansion of indirect Tang power perturbed the king of

60 "Silk road(s)" is a convenient shorthand for the network of overland and maritime routes that connected many different regions in Eurasia. The German geographer von Richthofen coined the term in the late nineteenth century, but it hides a complex world in which silk was far from the only good traded, and commercial contacts were only one of the many types of interactions between the societies of medieval Eurasia.

61 Liu, "Migration and Settlement."

62 Hansen, *Silk Road*, 56–73.

63 Faxian, *Zhuan Yi Juan*, 3ff.

64 Xuanzang, *Da Tang Xiyu ji*, 19ff.

neighbouring Karakhoja (Chinese: Gaochang, located near modern Turfan in Xinjiang), although initially he tried to maintain friendly relations with the Tang emperor, and even visited the court in Chang'an in person in 630. Then, in 632, the small state of Karashahr (Chinese: Yanqi) to the west of Karakhoja requested Taizong permission to reopen the old trade route that bypassed Karakhoja to the south. Taizong agreed, but this meant a decline in the volume of trade passing through Karakhoja, and a concomitant loss in revenue for the king. In response, the king allied himself with the Western Türks and invaded Karashahr. Taizong felt obliged to react. If we explain this in terms of the Tang's worldview, we can say Taizong simply fulfilled his duty to protect his vassal, the ruler of Karashahr; but from a pragmatic standpoint, the trade routes were an important part of the Tang's economy with the trade in luxury goods, and that reason may have dominated Taizong's decision to send an army across such a long distance. The kingdom fell swiftly after the death of its king, who is said to have died of fright as the Tang troops arrived, despite his earlier scepticism about their ability to traverse the vast expanse of desert.⁶⁵

Thus came back the same question as after the submission of the Eastern Türks: how should this newly conquered city-state best be administered? And, once again, the emperor and some of his most prominent advisers were at loggerheads. Wei Zheng and Chu Suiliang (596–658 CE) argued strongly against Taizong's wish to turn the former Karakhoja kingdom into a regular prefecture. In their eyes, a simple cost-benefit analysis showed that there was no material gain for the Tang. As a recently conquered area, with no inherent desire among the population to belong to the Tang empire, a large and permanent Tang military presence would be required. This meant sending soldiers from the Tang's core territory across the vast desert, which could only be undertaken at huge financial and human cost. Wei and Chu argued that many soldiers would perish on the journey west. Any taxes in cloth or grain raised from the new prefecture would never benefit the Tang empire itself but instead be consumed locally by that large number of troops.⁶⁶ The emperor still pushed his will through, and Karakhoja became integrated into the regular Tang local administration as Xizhou (western prefecture), with a sizeable army permanently stationed there.

Now the ruler of Karashahr, originally the benefactor of the Tang's campaign against Karakhoja, became worried his state would become the next victim of the expansion, which now reached far across what had hitherto appeared as unsurmountable limits imposed by logistics. He ceased tribute missions to Tang and instead concluded a marriage alliance with the ruler of the Western Türks. From the Tang point of view, this constituted sufficient cause to launch an attack to bring this vassal back in the fold. Assistance from the Western Türks, nor from Kucha (Chinese: Qiuci) further west, could stop the Tang forces from conquering Karashahr, and now the Tang empire controlled another key city on the trade routes of Central Asia.

Kucha was the next objective. Despite its failure to defend Karashahr and contain Tang expansion in the Western Regions, it showed no remorse and instead also cut off

⁶⁵ *Zizhi tongjian*, 195, 6267.

⁶⁶ *Zhenguan zhengyao*, 507.

further tribute missions to Tang. In 648, the Tang army conquered this kingdom in a punitive expedition. Kashgar (Chinese: Sule), at the western end of the Tarim basin, and Khotan (Chinese: Yutian) on the southern road had already earlier submitted voluntarily to the Tang, but for good measure an impressive Tang force was deployed near Khotan and its ruler was pressured into “visiting” Chang’an to formally submit to Tang Taizong. With four garrisons established in Karashahr, Kucha, Kashgar, and Khotan, the region and the trade routes were now fully controlled by the Tang.⁶⁷

The conquest had significant consequences in the Western Regions at the economic level, but also on local culture and society. An astonishing amount of detail on local life in the oasis cities during the Early Middle Ages has survived, thanks to the dry desert climate which preserved many documents, including those in the “time capsule” of the Dunhuang library cave near Karakhoja. In combination with other archaeological finds, these documents show the shifting influence of the neighbouring empires, contacts with near and distant trading partners and rulers, and fluctuations in trading patterns. Valerie Hansen’s careful analysis of these documents shows that the largest volume of economic development and trade took place during the period of Tang Chinese occupation, which lasted just over one century from 640 to 755, with an interruption when Tibet controlled much of the region between 670 and 693. The military is key to understanding this phenomenon. Tang forces were paid in silk and bronze coins from taxes raised in kind in the economic heart of the empire.⁶⁸ This brought large amounts of money into the local economy and stimulated trade at all levels. The archaeological and documentary record suggests that both before and after the Tang occupation the region’s economy was much more limited, with small-scale trade between oases and a self-sufficient economy. This suggests that Wei Zheng and Chu Suiliang’s worries had proven right: the flourishing economy at the centre of the Tang empire subsidized the economy of the oasis cities. Nevertheless, the luxury goods from Central Asia or further west, which found their way to Chang’an, also helped to stimulate the Tang economy.⁶⁹

Although the influence of Tang power seems deep, it did not permanently alter the structure of political organization or culture in the Western Regions; they did not become part of an extended cultural China after 755, when the Tang troops retreated in response to the uprising of An Lushan. In this part of the empire, political control was aimed at creating smoother commercial contacts. Of all the city-states in the region, Karakhoja, which was located closest to the Central Plain, was most influenced by Chinese models of government. It had been under Chinese administration of one form or another from the western Han (25–220 CE) dynasty onwards, and even during periods of independence, the state was strongly influenced by that experience.⁷⁰ This can be seen, for instance, in the use of the Chinese language, which is attested for the period 273–769 CE.⁷¹ Yet there

67 Wechsler, “T’ai-tsung the Consolidator,” 228.

68 Arakawa, “Tax Textiles.”

69 Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*, 38.

70 *Zhoushu*, 50: 914–15; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 90–91.

71 Hansen, *Silk Road*, 83.

was also a strong influence of the Iranian or Persian cultural traditions in addition to Buddhism. More significantly, the many decades of the strong presence of the Tang military and civil administration did not lead to *huaxia* culture taking root and transforming the culture of the Western Regions. After the Tang troops withdrew, even Karakhoja ceased to use Chinese for its written language, and the volume of trade flowing through the oasis-states to Chang'an sharply declined. The way to the West was transformed when it ceased to be a part of the lived experience of many administrators and soldiers sent on tours of duty in that part of the world, and the Western Regions and the countries beyond became the stuff of stories and poems.⁷² Only in the eighteenth century did it become again unified with a China-based regime, when the Manchu incorporated it into their Qing empire.

East Asia

In contrast with the northern and northwestern frontier areas, those to the east and southwest of the Tang empire responded differently to the intense and long-term contacts with the Central Plain, where the political centres of successive Chinese dynasties were located. In present-day northern Vietnam, Tang Chinese governance exerted a strong influence on the development of states long after the fall of the Tang. This was the result of the occupation of the region since the Han dynasty. Despite the occasional attempt to shake off foreign rule, the Annam region, as northern Vietnam was known during the Tang period, did not gain true independence from meddling Chinese regimes until after the Tang dynasty. At that point there was no alternative large power which could attract Annam into its own orbit, and instead the polities that emerged here looked to the Tang and its predecessors for the organization of an agrarian state. The Tang's interventions in the southwest were, similar to the Western Regions, strongly influenced by commercial concerns, because through the harbour of Jiaozhou (modern Hanoi) in this area the Tang state had access to goods traded with Southeast Asia.⁷³

The situation in Northeast Asia had started similarly to Annam: the northern part of the Korean Peninsula and the territories immediately north of the Yalu river were conquered and governed as four commanderies of the extended Chinese empire, from 108 BCE until 317 CE.⁷⁴ During those four centuries, the influence of the Chinese commanderies decreased gradually, but it was not until 317, a century after the fall of the Han dynasty, that the last of the commanderies was given up. Then the paths of development between Annam and the northeast began to diverge, as Koguryō and the other polities on the Korean Peninsula now developed without direct interference from the Central Plain. Yet the former experience of the Han empire's rule, and the proximity to the successors of the Han empire had a strong influence on the type of state that developed here. Three polities competed for dominance on the Korean Peninsula from the

⁷² Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 35.

⁷³ Schafer, *Vermilion Bird*.

⁷⁴ Byington, *Han Commanderies*.

early fourth to the mid seventh century: Koguryō's territory comprised the northern part of the peninsula and land across the Yalu and Tumen rivers; Paekche was located in the southwest; Silla in the southeast. Each attempted to get the upper hand through alliances, but also by strengthening royal power and centralizing the state apparatus, by modelling it on the structure of the Han bureaucracy. This process of secondary state formation began in Koguryō, and triggered a chain reaction that reached the Japanese archipelago.

Confucianism (*ru* scholarship) was seen as a proven ideology for the administration of a strong centralized agrarian state. In 372, the Koguryō king established an academy (*taehak*), and in the same year Buddhism was officially introduced. His successor also ordered that the Buddhist *dharmā* be followed, to seek blessings, and that temples should be constructed.⁷⁵ In China the sudden rise in popularity of Buddhism from the third century onwards can be attributed to the search for spiritual guidance when, after the fall of the Han empire, Confucian ideas became discredited due to their connection to the imperial ideology. In Koguryō, Buddhism worked in tandem with the state to support a centralized monarchy: in exchange for patronage of the new religion with, for instance temple construction, Buddhist monks prayed for the Buddha's protection of their royal benefactors. The Buddhist worldview and teachings about karmic retribution could also be interpreted as an explanation for the social hierarchy and status quo. The king and royal family at the apex, the ministers, and officials overseeing the masses were rewarded for good behaviour in past incarnations. In turn, the idea of rebirth could give hope to those in the lower classes of society that adhering to the rules in this life might lead to an improvement in social status in the next.⁷⁶ Although we have no documents confirming that Koguryō people interpreted the Buddhist notion of reincarnation in this way, the elite strongly favoured Buddhist themes in tomb murals from the fifth century onwards, a time that coincided with an increased centralization of the bureaucracy and the elevation of royal power.

Koguryō's growth in power and its territorial expansion prompted a similar process of centralization of royal power and state bureaucracy in Paekche and Silla. That effect also rippled across the sea to Japan via Paekche, which went in search of allies to ward off Koguryō and (to a lesser extent) Silla. Paekche immigrants introduced in the kingdom of Yamato Chinese writing in the fifth century, and with it government technologies and Buddhism. The two polities became increasingly connected, as they concluded military alliances against Silla and Koguryō.⁷⁷ The Yamato kingdom now shared the same written language, and much of the cultural background of its neighbours on the Korean Peninsula, and on the Chinese mainland.

With the unification of China under the Sui and Tang dynasty, the political ecosystem in Northeast Asia changed dramatically, in particular for Koguryō. Previously, internal divisions between northern and southern China gave Koguryō the opportunity

⁷⁵ *Samguk sagi*, 18: 345

⁷⁶ Chōn, *Koguryō kobunbyōkhwa yŏn'gu*, 134–37.

⁷⁷ Brown, *History of Japan*, 121.

to grow in power, influence, and territory relatively unchecked. But now such ambitions brought the kingdom into direct confrontation with the Sui and Tang emperors. While the invasions of the Eastern Türks were aimed at putting pressure on the Tang emperors, to extract portable wealth but without acquiring new territory and new responsibilities, Koguryō kings had qualitatively very different aims. They wanted to expand the territory under their direct control. In the intense competition for domination of the Korean Peninsula, Koguryō had hitherto enjoyed the advantage that it could expand its territory along its northern and western borders. But now it was confronted by a unified Sui or Tang empire.

For the emperors of the Sui and early Tang dynasty, Koguryō was a significant problem. It is easy to interpret the Sui and Tang attacks on Koguryō as examples of imperial megalomania, or Han Wudi syndrome, as Arthur Wright termed it: futile attempts to establish anew the borders of the western Han state, with the emperors (and in particular Sui Yangdi and Tang Taizong) not taking into account the changed situation.⁷⁸ Koguryō was indeed the only polity bordering on the empire that remained recalcitrant in the face of a reunited Chinese empire following centuries of division. The kings had submitted in name to the Sui and Tang emperors but also displayed behaviour indicating they rejected the superior position of the Sui or Tang emperors.⁷⁹ The histories record complaints from tributary missions that Koguryō blocked their passage through its territory, for instance the overland missions from Paekche and Silla.⁸⁰ Furthermore, in the late sixth century, the Koguryō king led an invasion of subject Malgal riders into Sui territory, possibly in an attempt to increase his prestige in Koguryō by affirming his military leadership; and early in the seventh century the Sui emperor discovered a Koguryō envoy visiting the tent camp of the Eastern Turkic qaghan, possibly in the middle of negotiations for an alliance against the Sui. These incidents constituted improper behaviour for a vassal of the Chinese emperors and warranted a punitive expedition. The Sui dynasty undertook multiple campaigns against Koguryō, but in the end this only speeded up the demise of the dynasty.⁸¹

The first two Tang emperors were keen to avoid the same fate as the Sui dynasty, and relations with Koguryō initially seemed to set off on more amicable terms. However, tensions on the peninsula between the three kingdoms of Koguryō, Paekche, and Silla—all vassals of the Tang emperors—required Tang Taizong to arbitrate. Initial attempts to defuse the situation with diplomatic solutions failed, but he refrained from undertaking military action: the regions closest to Koguryō had suffered most during the civil war in the Sui–Tang transition, and he did not want to burden the population there unnecessarily. Then, in 642, Taizong received the news that a high-ranking official named Yōn

78 Wright, “Sui Yang-Ti”; Wright, “T’ang T’ai-tsung.”

79 Gaozu, the first Tang emperor, had floated the idea of leaving Koguryō be, but his advisers rejected this and insisted that if the kingdom called itself a vassal of the emperor, it also should behave like this in reality (*Jiu Tangshu*, 199a: 5321).

80 *Jiu Tangshu*, 199a: 5321.

81 Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 138–59.

Kaesomun had killed the king of Koguryō and appointed himself to the highest civil and military office of the kingdom. Because the king was his vassal, Taizong was morally obliged to react. Here again a combination of strategic concerns about Koguryō and a desire to finish the reconstruction of the Han territory drove Taizong to attempt the conquest of this northeast Asian kingdom, rather than a mere sense of moral obligation. In the end, Koguryō did not fall to Taizong, despite launching multiple attacks and leading one in person in 645. It was under his son Gaozong in 668 that Tang troops defeated Koguryō, but only after a change in strategy.⁸² A Tang–Silla alliance conquered Paekche first, legitimized as a punishment for putting Silla under pressure and cooperating with Koguryō. Just like Taizong had used Yōn Kaesomun's act of regicide to launch his own invasion of Koguryō when it suited the wider strategic purposes of the Tang empire, his son Gaozong could draw on the language of the Tang worldview to support a loyal vassal and chastise a disobedient one to justify the change in strategy. With the conquest of Paekche in 660, Tang armies now had a permanent foothold in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula, and they used this to open another front with Koguryō. After decades of intermittent warfare with the Sui and Tang, Koguryō's capital Pyongyang was conquered in 668. A newly established Andong ("Pacify the East") protectorate controlled the conquered territories. The Tang forces' success did not last long. Resistance remained strong, and simultaneously at the western frontiers the Tibetans threatened to occupy Tang territory.⁸³ In 678, merely ten years after the fall of Koguryō, Tang troops began to retreat from the peninsula, and the headquarters of the protectorate were moved from Pyongyang to a fortress north of the Yalu river.

The influence of Tang culture endured in this region far longer than in almost any other part of the extended Tang territory. Despite the army's inability to keep the region under direct Tang rule or to ever reach the isles of Japan, northeast Asian polities actively and voluntarily kept importing Tang culture and institutions, as they had done in the centuries before. The process of secondary state formation from the preceding centuries had laid a strong foundation which allowed for expansion of the shared cultural sphere. At the most elementary level, these polities shared a similar economic basis as agrarian states, which required a literate ruling elite for efficient extraction of resources through taxation. While Koguryō had been the first in the late fourth century to begin this process, Silla was the most thorough of the three, blending Tang institutions with its own pre-existing system of government and social organization. The central bureaucracy and the court as well as the local administration, including the newly acquired territories from Paekche and southern Koguryō all were modelled on the Tang system.

The power of the Tang model for northeast Asian states is, however, best illustrated with the case of a new kingdom that was founded in the wake of the destruction of Koguryō: Parhae (Chinese: Bohai).⁸⁴ In the *jimi* prefectures of the Tang's northeastern

82 Wang (Zhenping), *Multi-polar Asia*, 55–81; Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 195–201.

83 Chen, *Tang dai zheng zhi shi*, 128.

84 The names of the kingdom and its inhabitants can in Western publications be transcribed in Korean or Chinese since we lack information about the linguistic family of the Malgal/Mohe. The historical affiliation of the kingdom is contested between Korea, China, and Russia.

frontier region, a group of Malgal (Chinese: Mohe) people were employed as auxiliary forces to defend the border. Likely they were former subjects of Koguryō who had been forcibly resettled after the conquest of Koguryō in 668, like most of the Koguryō elite of the kingdom. At the end of the seventh century, they returned to their ancestral lands in modern Jilin province. Because no other regime had yet filled the political vacuum created by the conquest of Koguryō, these Malgal were able to combine the population of Koguryō and some Malgal tribes which had remained in the area, and founded a kingdom which became known as Parhae. The small, new state initially turned to the Eastern Turkic qaghan, whose resurgent Turkic empire hampered direct communication with the Tang court. The political situation in Chang'an must have appeared unstable to contemporary observers: the wife of Emperor Gaozong, Empress Wu, had supplanted the Tang ruling house and proclaimed herself emperor of a new Zhou dynasty. But a few years after the Tang was restored in 711, formal contacts between Parhae and Chang'an were established, and the first Parhae king sent envoys and a royal prince to the Tang court.⁸⁵

As the northeast Asian political landscape adapted to the new situation, Parhae came into conflict with Tang and Silla in the 730s. The similarities with Koguryō are striking: the king of Parhae was accused of extending his influence over groups which had submitted to the Tang emperor, and he had blocked passage for them to travel to Chang'an. Moreover, in 732 he sent a naval force (described in the Chinese sources as "pirates") to Dengzhou, the harbour on the northern side of the Shandong peninsula, which was one of the main entry points for Silla envoys and merchants to Tang China. Similar to the Koguryō invasion of the Sui in the late sixth century, the attempted invasion accomplished little, and the naval force retreated quickly. Was this, too, part of an attempt of the Parhae king to shore up his domestic political capital, as the Koguryō king's behaviour could be explained? Unfortunately, we lack information about the situation inside Parhae at this point, and indeed throughout its history: only a handful of materials written by the people of Parhae have survived, and the sources produced in Tang China, Silla or Japan rarely provide details about the domestic political situation.

From the reign of the third king onwards contacts with Tang took a much more positive turn: regular trade and diplomatic missions made their way to Chang'an, even long after the rebellion of An Lushan dealt the prestige of the Tang empire a considerable blow, although Parhae kings also maintained friendly and official diplomatic relations with the autonomous governors of the northeastern frontier command of Youzhou. From what we can gather in the sources, relations with Silla remained tense, but again, from the reign of the third king onwards violent, armed confrontations made place for diplomatic disputes and cultural competition.

One of the reasons for this change is that the kings of Parhae actively imported many aspects of Tang Chinese government, which provided a common foundation for solving disputes without recourse to violence. Although Koguryō had also used elements of a Chinese government model, in the case of Parhae this had a more profound effect on the structure of the state. In Koguryō, legitimacy of a king's power was to a large degree still

⁸⁵ *Xin Tangshu*, 220: 6179; Wang (Zhenping), *Multi-polar Asia*, 55–96.

determined by his military leadership. The kings of Parhae managed to shift the touchstone for legitimation of their rule to different values, based on Confucian and Buddhist notions of kingship. Furthermore, while Koguryō kings had expanded their territory largely in the absence of strong contending powers from the Central Plain, Parhae was on its western and southern frontier confronted by well-developed and powerful states, and its kings quickly realized that survival of the kingdom hinged on finding a *modus vivendi*, and not all-out conquest.

Parhae's adoption of Tang government technology was not limited to the writing system, the elite's study of Confucianism or practice of Buddhism. It included art, funerary practices, and, perhaps most impressively, an entire bureaucracy modelled on that of the Tang's "Three Departments and Six Ministries" (*san sheng liu bu*). A description of the government administration of Parhae preserved in *The New History of the Tang* makes an explicit comparison with the Tang, providing for each of the offices and titles of Parhae their Tang equivalent. Parhae used the trifold division of a chancellery, secretariat, and department of state affairs, the latter with six ministries, as well as a censorate, palace library, state academy directorate, and courts for the daily organization of palace life. This layout was completely parallel to that of the Tang but with different names.⁸⁶ Some caveats need to be observed, though. It is not clear at which point in time Parhae developed or even finalized this system. It is, for instance, possible that this describes the ninth-century government of the kingdom and that the eighth century bureaucracy was much less refined. Another possibility is that this model existed merely on paper and was only minimally implemented in reality; neither is it clear how much power these offices had in relation to the power of the king or the crown prince.⁸⁷

As a result of the thorough assimilation of Tang culture, the Parhae kings and elite were able to transform the tensions with Tang and Silla from potential military confrontations to cultural competitions. Silla and Parhae sent their most gifted students to Chang'an for study at the state academy, and they took part in the examinations to qualify for civil-service appointments. Traditionally, Silla students always ranked first among the foreigners, but in the late ninth century Parhae topped the list a couple of times, much to the chagrin of Silla graduates.⁸⁸ Positions at imperial banquets were equally contested: sitting closer to the emperor signified a higher status among the Tang vassals; one Japanese envoy reported to the throne in Japan in 754 that he was seated closer to the emperor than the Silla envoy. There are doubts about the authenticity of this report, but this indicates that the status reflected in a seating plan mattered sufficiently to tempt this envoy into fabricating this detail to increase his prestige at the Japanese court.⁸⁹ With such significance attached to rankings, it is not surprising that Parhae in the late ninth century tried to make the case that it had now surpassed Silla and thus should be seated closer to the emperor than Silla. This caused a diplomatic conflict, but

⁸⁶ *Xin Tangshu*, 219: 6182–83.

⁸⁷ Wang (Chengli), *Bohai jian shi*, 105–7; Sakayora, "Bokkai Ōken No," 361–65.

⁸⁸ Zhang and Zhang, "Bohai yu Xinluo."

⁸⁹ Wang (Xiaofu), *Sheng Tang shidai*, 336.

the emperor ruled that Silla's position remained at the top. Raw power could not trump the established protocol. A letter from Silla's chief minister Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn (857–early tenth century), himself a graduate of the Tang state academy and a former Tang official, expressed his gratitude for this judgement and emphasized the extremely humble origins of Parhae. He explained that this social upstart's lack of propriety meant it did not understand its position in refined company: "They are ashamed to be the back of a cow, but strive to be the head of a dragon ... In reality [Parhae] doesn't know how to behave properly towards a superior."⁹⁰ Although these remarks undoubtedly hurt the kings of Parhae, the intense rivalry between the two kingdoms did not lead to armed conflict.

A similar development took place in Japan. Although military confrontation was rarely a real threat in Japan's foreign relations, Japanese troops had fought on the Korean Peninsula: against Koguryŏ in the fourth century,⁹¹ and in support of Paekche against the Tang occupation in 663.⁹² In both cases they were defeated. But, overall, visits from the court of the Japanese emperor, and Japanese interest in Chinese government structure and concomitant culture could be interpreted at the Tang court as confirmation of the empire's success in attracting people from distant lands, thus reinforcing the Tang emperor's charismatic power and mandate to rule. Sceptics could have argued that polities bordering on Tang territory became vassals voluntarily in a selfish attempt at self-preservation to forestall a Tang invasion, but even they would have to acknowledge that the motivations of the Japanese to accept the status of tribute-bearing vassal must have been very different: the voyage across the sea was expensive and dangerous, and there was never any indication that a regime from the Central Plain would contemplate an invasion of the archipelago.

Yet Japan benefited tremendously from partaking voluntarily in the Chinese cultural sphere. This can perhaps be described as a case of tertiary state formation because Paekche had developed a close relationship with the elite of Japan from the fifth century on, and introduced the idea of writing, Buddhism, and more complex government institutions. From the seventh century, the Japanese court regularly sent delegations directly to the Sui and Tang. Buddhist monks travelled with them, much like monks from China had gone to India "in search of Buddhist teachings" (*qiu fa*). Japanese students joined those from Silla and Parhae in Chang'an and also brought back to Japan ideas about literature, poetry, visual arts, and music.⁹³ Japan thus shared a foundation of intellectual orientation, religion, and cultural expression with Tang, Silla, and Parhae, all of which began with the use of a shared written language. Parhae and Japan became close partners, sending diplomatic missions regularly to each other's court, and sometimes Japanese envoys or monks travelled through Parhae to Tang territory to avoid the dangerous direct sea route. Japan ceased its missions to Tang in the late ninth century, but sufficient amounts of Tang culture, and in particular court culture, had been absorbed to maintain that cultural connection.

⁹⁰ *Tongmunsŏn*, 3: 635.

⁹¹ Hatada, "King Kwanggaet'o."

⁹² Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 199.

⁹³ Okazaki, "Japan and the Continent."

None of the northeast Asian states was ever a pure replica of the Tang, but the many shared characteristics were clearly present and allowed for cultural and diplomatic exchange to resolve conflict, instead of resorting to violence, and this laid the foundation for “East Asia” as we know it today. Yet this development of East Asia as a cultural sphere was not linear. In the centuries following the collapse of the Tang, there were deviations and dead ends, and the cultural homogeneity was severely threatened at times, while transformations took the polities far from their commonly shared base. Parhae, for instance, was destroyed by invading Khitan in 926. These had just founded their own state modelled on the Tang. The Khitan’s Liao dynasty, and their successor, the Jurchen’s Jin dynasty, tried to create a dual administration to keep their own tribal organization intact, while incorporating a large segment of Han agrarian people. Parhae officials’ expertise was transferred to the Liao, and from there to the Jin, allowing these states to create another distinct variation on the theme of a Tang-inspired state, but the Parhae people, or the Malgal who founded Parhae, were unable to found another state of their own.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Overall then, we see a major evolution in the Tang dynasty from an expansionist and interventionist force in the first half of the dynasty to a power that was significantly reduced in military strength and ability to intervene or to protect its own interests outside (and at times inside) its core territory. But throughout this period we also see the rise of the Tang as a cultural focal point for eastern Eurasia, regardless of the dynasty’s military and political power. The Tang period spells a time in Chinese and East Asian history when engagement with the wider world changed significantly, and as a result both China and that wider Asian world were transformed through economic, cultural, political, and religious connections. The empire’s connections to the wider world, as an economic and military force in the first half of the dynasty, or as pervasive cultural influence in East Asia in the second half of the period under consideration, certainly left an enduring impact on eastern Eurasia and make it one of the most fascinating periods in the study of Chinese history.

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94 Sloane, “Parhae in Historiography,” 10.

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Chapter 8

TIBET

Lewis Doney

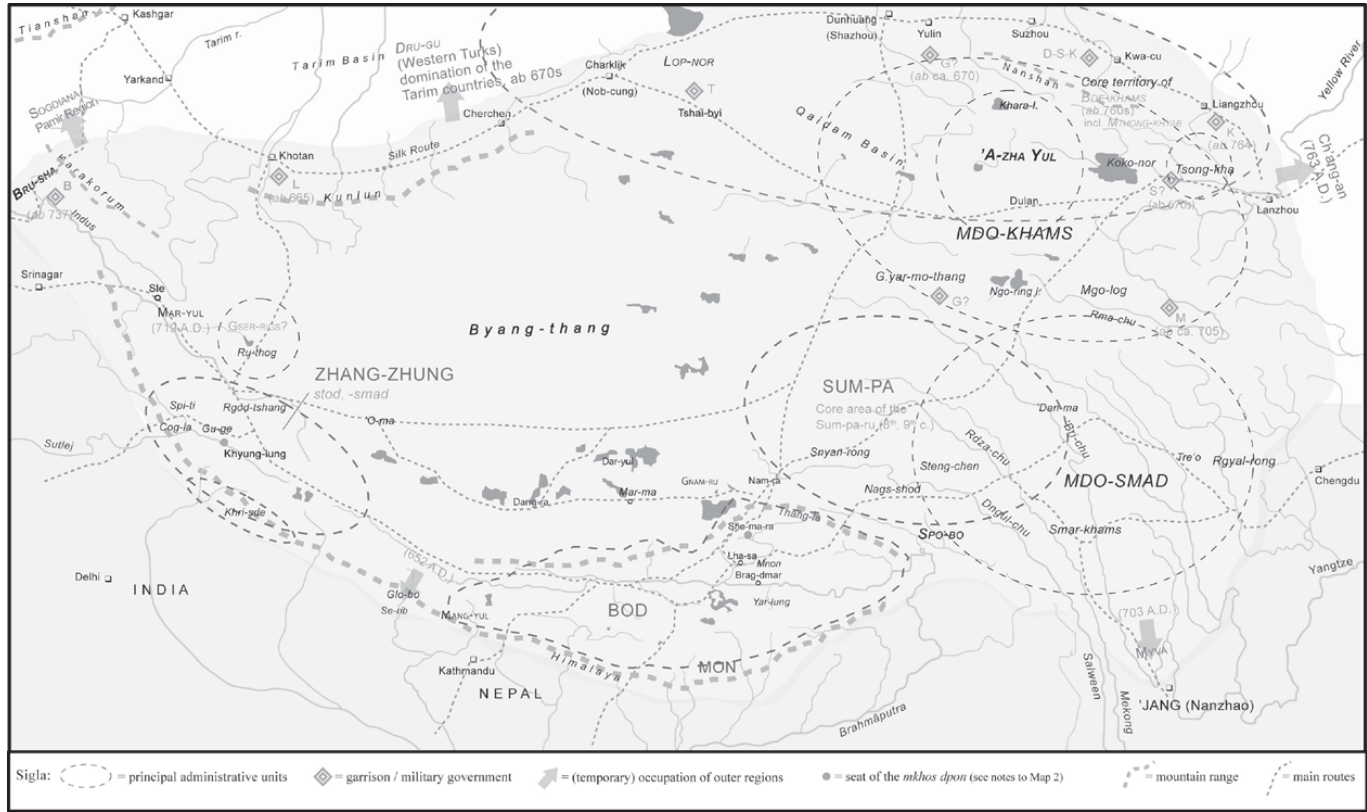
Introduction

The geographical extent of what constitutes “Tibet” (Bod/Bautai/Baitai/Tubbat/Fa/Tufan) in this contribution varies considerably as the Tibetan empire (ca. 600–850 CE) expanded and contracted at its various borders over time.¹ In fact, even the existence of the very thing at the beginning of the seventh century is open to debate, and so I shall prefer to speak of the empire of the Yar lung (/klung) dynasty. This indicates the hereditary lineage of power originating in and based around the Yar lung valley, in what I shall call for ease “central Tibet,” corresponding to the more eastern part of the area marked “Bod” (the standard Tibetan word for Tibet) on [Map 8](#).² From this power base, the Yar lung dynasty expanded in all directions except much to the direct south (due in part to the Himalayas), and so the land that Arabic sources of this period, for instance, called Tubbat was situated west of China, north of India, south of the Uyghur Turkic territories, and east of the Khurasan marches.

The Yar lung dynasty’s power base was at first ensured by alliances with a small collection of other minimally developed nomadic-pastoralist and agricultural families or clans centred around the relatively fertile region through which the gTsang po River (or Brahmāputra) flows. The increase in their power meant coming to rule over a far larger but still sparsely populated area, corresponding to the Tibetan Plateau and even beyond, inhabited by connected ethnic groups sharing the spoils of military conquest, silk-road trade, and the taxation of others’ trade. This expansion was achieved by taking control of other kingdoms, city-states, and regions (by alliance or force) between the seventh and ninth centuries and ruling them as an empire with an emperor (*btsan po*) at its head. The term *btsan po* is difficult to translate but may be akin to the term

1 On the earliest references to the various designations of “Tibet,” see Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 7. The most accessible introduction to this period is van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 1–50. Another, denser, but still accessible account is Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 51–83. Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, remains the most impressive monograph-length study of the Tibetan empire’s foreign relations, while Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, is a mine of historical and geographical information on the empire itself.

2 This map is taken from Hazod, “Imperial Central Tibet,” 166 (map 2) and reproduced with the kind permission of Guntram Hazod.



Map 8. Tibet, 600-900 CE.
© Gunthram Hazod.

“emperor” used for the historical rulers of China or Japan.³ In other words, it is an indigenous term for the sole ruler of the Tibetan state. The term *btsan po*, when used alone without adjectival qualification, is therefore inapplicable either to anyone in the same country who has not held this position or to the head of another state, kingdom, or empire (who are all considered inferior; see Tibetan references below to the Chinese emperor as only a “ruler”). From the seventh century onwards, though, the Yar lung rulers were also “emperors” in the more literal sense of the term, “ones who rule over an empire,” and the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) referred to them as either *btsan po* or using terms meaning “emperor” from this period onwards.⁴ Since the ruler was an emperor, he was subject to no other ruler, so it is only natural to try to convince others to submit. As Beckwith states, this “system of kingship provided a strong impetus to expansion.”⁵ The Tibetan, Chinese, and Arabic histories written soon after this period all claim that the Yar lung rulers conquered the “kings of the four directions and forced them to pay tribute.”⁶

The Tibetan empire reached its greatest extent during the reign of Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan (756–ca. 800 CE). In the northwest, it threatened the territory of the fourth and fifth ‘Abbāsīd caliphs, Al-Mansur (714–775 CE) and Harun al-Rashid (763/766–809 CE), on the banks of the Oxus; in the east, the Tibetan army even occupied the Chinese capital Chang’an (present-day Xi’an) for fifteen days in 763, during which time they named a new Chinese emperor and even announced the beginning of a new era.⁷ Khri Srong lde brtsan also presided over the growing institutionalization of Buddhism in his empire, as a state religion (though not necessarily the only one). This patronage was epitomized by his construction of the bSam yas monastery, one of the first large-scale Buddhist constructions on the Tibetan Plateau. Its architecture shows signs of influence from the older Buddhist cultures surrounding the empire at this time—most notably south Asia and China. If I do not do justice to these two great neighbouring civilizations in this contribution, it is because here I wish to focus on the impact on Tibetan culture of the smaller regions that the Yar lung dynasty’s empire actually controlled, which are generally less well covered in introductions to this period. These influences, and the reciprocal effect that imperial rule exerted (especially on the southern silk road) during this time, will be among the main topics for discussion in this chapter. It will be seen that this period, when seemingly “everything happened” for the Tibetans and their neighbours in the north and east, constituted a moment of high connectivity in religious and material culture, trade, war, and diplomatic relations not to be matched again in the region until the Yuan dynasty of the Mongols (1271–1368).

3 See Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 14–15n10.

4 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 20.

5 Beckwith, “Tibetan Empire in the West,” 30.

6 Beckwith, “Tibetan Empire in the West,” 30.

7 See Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 143–57.

The Beginning of the Tibetan Empire

The prevailing consensus among scholars studying imperial “Tibet” is that Tibetans are genetically diverse today and were historically ethnically diverse too. Matthew T. Kapstein states of the Tibetan Plateau:

With a mean elevation of over 12,000 feet and an area of some 1.2 million square miles, it is by far the most extensive high-altitude region on earth. Roughly speaking, the Tibetan Plateau embraces one-third of the territory of modern China and is the size of the entire Republic of India.⁸

The prehistoric inhabitants of the Tibetan Plateau were of different ethnic groups, as is reflected in their clan names during the imperial period and even today, before becoming ethnically Tibetan over the course of the past two millennia.⁹ Aside from Turkic and Tibeto-Burmese, there is also evidence of some later Indo-Scythian contact, as suggested by the tumulus burial traditions archaeologists have described across the plateau.¹⁰ However, in pre-imperial times these different groups came together and lived in connected polities or small kingdoms (*rgyal phran*) of kin-based groups that can perhaps justifiably be called Tibetan by the late sixth century. Guntram Hazod points out that the common ancestry of the Tibetans narrated in later Buddhist historiography,

were associated with Minyag (Tangut), the Sumpa (Chinese: Supi) and Azha (Chinese: Tuyuhun) [in the northeast] (both of Turkic tongues) and with the population of Zhangzhung (Zhang-zhung). The last mentioned relates to the prehistoric Zhangzhung power in present-day west Tibet, which was conquered by the Tibetans in the seventh century. In this account the Zhangzhung people are linked with the *rü* (clan, lit. “bone”) called Ma (rma), a term for “man” and an ethnonym that in this classification probably also includes the originally Tibeto-Burmese population of the Highlands usually associated with the name *Mön* (Mon).¹¹

Thus, the commonly understood extent of “Tibet” has more to do with the incorporation of a number of ethnicities (most notably Turkic and Tibeto-Burmese) within a single cultural matrix over time than a shared genetic makeup, and the Tibetan empire and its imposed *lingua franca* Tibetan spoken and written language (known as Old Tibetan) made a significant and long-lasting impact in this respect (see below).¹²

The ninth-century narrative history known as *The Old Tibetan Chronicle* states that the Tibetan empire was formed out of these mid-sixth-century polities, spearheaded by one such patrilineal group named the house of Yar lung.¹³ “Spearheaded” is a particularly apt description here, since it appears that the success of the burgeoning Tibetan empire

8 Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 3.

9 Hazod, “Tribal Mobility.”

10 Hazod, “Imperial Central Tibet,” 175.

11 Hazod, “Tribal Mobility,” 44n2; square brackets are mine.

12 See also Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 27–33.

13 Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 16–17.

may have been due in large part to its military harnessing of iron-forging technology.¹⁴ The Yar lung group raised a bloody rebellion against another kinship lineage (that of Ngas po to the north) and rallied the heads of other ruling houses (the dBas, Myang, gNon, and Tshes-pong) as loyal ministers and councillors (*blon [po]*) around their new ruler (*rje*), sons of sTag bu sNya gzig. The successful lineage of rulers, also known as the sPu rgyal dynasty, thus controlled what they called “rTsang Bod,” (corresponding to “Bod” on Map 8), in the early seventh century.¹⁵

At this time, there were no cities, no Buddhist monasteries or other large centres of population. Only after the fall of the empire did the town of Lhasa (first known as the temple site of Ra sa in the eighth century) grow into a hub of pilgrimage and then of trade and eventually a capital. In the early imperial period, the emperors either lived in fortified castles or sat at the head of a mobile court that travelled around central Tibet as a tented encampment. Chinese visitors to the court in the early ninth century, as described by Sam van Schaik following Chinese sources, encountered

a vast tented encampment, with the tsenpo's [emperor's] tent in the very middle, surrounded by a fence of spears. Within this enclosure, halberds were planted in the ground every ten paces. In the middle, great flags flapped in the wind. At each gate to the residence there were armed guards and priests wearing bird-shaped hats and tiger girdles. Inside, the tsenpo sat on a platform ornamented with gold dragons, lizards, tigers and leopards. He was dressed in plain cloth, with his head bound in a turban of bright red silk. At his right-hand side was the prime minister, a Buddhist monk [though this was probably not the case at the early court]. The other ministers sat below the platform.¹⁶

Not much is known about life outside the court, but even today the climate in central Tibet is quite mild compared to surrounding parts of the plateau, and the lower valleys can be tilled as arable land while the upper valleys are grazed by cattle. This means that a mixed agricultural-pastoral economy was always the norm, in contrast to the higher northern plateau where only the latter was possible.¹⁷ Evidence suggests that the population of central Tibet shared similarities in ethnicity, livelihood, and language (the latter only unified with an official script in the seventh century). Despite these unifying features, the Tibetan heartland was still sparsely populated and divided along regional and clan lines. Each generation of allied clans enthroned a male of the Yar lung dynasty to act as a *primus inter pares* ruler of an empire consisting of a number of conquered

14 Pre-Common Era metal items associated with horsemanship, hunting, and warfare discovered in Tibet are made of bronze and have more in common with the western Iranian province of Lorestan, so may have been sourced there (Melikan-Chirvani, “Iran to Tibet,” 90–92). In contrast, it appears that the indigenous forging of iron allowed for weapons and other items of warfare to become more plentiful on the Tibetan plateau itself and available for the Yar lung dynasty’s military to use.

15 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 8.

16 van Schaik, *Tibet*, 43. (Square brackets are mine.)

17 Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 6.

kingdoms. Loyal ministers, drawn from not only the families who had first supported the Yar lung house but also principalities newly encompassed by the empire, did service to the emperors and their sons. These ministers and their families benefited thereby with land taken from disloyal or rival rulers. The empire thus led to new ways of stratifying elite society through the creation of an aristocracy and a large degree of favouritism shown to these select few within law.¹⁸ As the emperor moved his itinerant court of administrators, judiciary, priests, and guards in semi-nomadic fashion around the lands of his loyal aristocracy, he would thereby draw on aristocratic wealth for the provision of his court and constantly renew or reinforce the bond between ruler and ministerial family and his position as *primus inter pares*.¹⁹ The *primus inter pares* form of rulership seems to have been deeply unstable and in the end unsustainable, so that either Buddhism or the economic bankruptcy caused by the end of the expansion of empire, or both, led to the collapse of this important binding force and the eventual implosion of the sPu rgyal dynasty of Yar lung.²⁰

The entire duration of the imperial period, like its beginning, was marked by internal power struggles, marital alliances, and territorial disputes. These problems existed both within the Yar lung dynasty and also between them and other local polities and major families of central Tibet.²¹ In fact, the emperors did not always hold meaningful power (which sometimes resided with their queens), and the mGar family maintained a brief period of supremacy in the late seventh century, sometimes called a “shogunate” due to the fact that their power to subvert the rule of the emperor was based on their military prowess.²² However, such internal matters will not be emphasized in this more outward-facing contribution. Even before the imperial period, Tibetan kingdoms were surrounded by, and maintained some contact with, many stronger states, kingdoms, and empires. For instance, the son of the Ngas po lord defeated at the inception of Tibetan expansion in the late sixth century is said to have fled to Turkic territory (Dru gu).²³ Here I shall describe some of the other impacts that imperial relations had on the exchange of trade and technology between central Tibet and its neighbours listed by Hazod, above, as well as other city-states to the north (such as Khotan), Indic regions to the south and southwest, and, of course, Tang China. I shall move roughly clockwise around the compass, ending in the west and then returning to the northeast—these two points being where we have the greatest evidence for the lasting effects of the Tibetan empire after its collapse in the ninth century.

18 See Pirie, “Buddhist Law,” 3–5.

19 Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 43–46; Hazod, “Imperial Central Tibet.”

20 See Ramble, “Sacral Kings,” 129–33; Hazod, “Tribal Mobility,” 48; Beckwith, “Central Eurasian Culture Complex,” 233.

21 Hazod, “Tribal Mobility,” 49–55.

22 See Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 18–19.

23 Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 10.

The North

Whatever may have been the initial impetus for forming the Tibetan empire around the beginning of the seventh century, it soon coalesced around one major aim: “to realize a larger political and economic project, namely to participate more strongly in the markets on the Silk Road or to control them.”²⁴ To this end, the Yar lung dynasty spent lavishly on gaining military expertise in both weaponry and intelligence. They were aided by pre-existing links between the local polities surrounding Yar lung to the west and northeast and the wider world (only the uninhabitable Northern Plains [Byang thang; Chinese: Qiangtang] lay to the north and northwest). The dynasty further capitalized on these links through its civil and military cataloguing and division of these areas.²⁵ The invention of Tibetan writing during the reign of Emperor Khri Srong btsan (d. 649; known to later histories as Srong btsan sgam po, Srong btsan “the wise”) acted as a catalyst to this administrative ordering of the empire, with the Yar lung dynasty modifying a late Gupta script from northern India or Nepal for use in writing the Tibetan language.²⁶

Other Tibeto-Burman languages contemporaneously chose a Sinitic character script, for example the Mi nyag people (the Tibetan name for what would later become the Tanguts; Chinese: Dangxiang). Thus, the use of Gupta script was based on a pragmatic or political choice rather than a linguistic necessity. It may have been practical, perhaps because western Tibetan trade was already using an Indic script for its correspondence or record keeping, or because an alpha-syllabic script was considered easier for the administrators and generals to learn than one made up of thousands of characters. Another explanation may lie in the soft power of the intellectual and Buddhist traditions that were written in Prakrit and Sanskrit (see below). Alternatively (or additionally), the choice could have been politically motivated, due to closer relations with the kingdoms of Harṣavardhana Śīlāditya (ca. 590–648 CE) in India and the Newar Licchavis (ca. 400–750 CE) in what is now Nepal than with the Tang state during this period.²⁷ All of this suggests that, as Christopher I. Beckwith says, “the Tibetans were very well informed about the geography of their neighbours” and could keep written records on them.²⁸ The Tibetan conquest of the Tarim region, for instance, was the result of a carefully planned and executed strategy.

Tibetan military forces spread northwards into the Tarim Basin from at least 660 onwards, and by around 670 had gained the submission of the Western Türks there and conquered the silk-road states of Khotan (today’s Hotan; Chinese: Hetian), Kashgar (Chinese: Kashi), and Kucha (Chinese: Qiuci).²⁹ Khotan, on the southern silk road, was

²⁴ Hazod, “Tribal Mobility,” 46.

²⁵ See Lalou, “Catalogue”; Dotson, “Behest of the Mountain”; Hazod, “Tribal Mobility,” 46.

²⁶ See Scherrer-Schaub, “Archaeology of the Written,” 218–33; van Schaik, “A New Look”; Schuh, “Tibetische Inschriften.”

²⁷ Schuh, “Tibetische Inschriften,” 172; see also van Schaik, “A New Look,” 72–75.

²⁸ Beckwith, “Tibetan Empire in the West,” 30.

²⁹ Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 30–34; Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 7; Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 18.

to prove especially important to Tibetan writing technologies and to Buddhism. In 692, Chinese forces expelled the Tibetan occupiers from Khotan, but more than 100 years later, in the early 790s, they recaptured the kingdom.³⁰ The Tibetans, having borrowed their script from the south, appear to have inherited from the north a fairly well spread form of wooden writing support and method of ensuring the privacy and safe delivery of written messages. There is an evident continuity between the wooden slips and sealed wooden “epistles” conveyed along the southern silk road around Khotan (written on in Kharoṣṭhī script) from the third to fourth centuries and those in Khotanese and Tibetan during the eighth century.³¹ Tibetans most likely borrowed their epistolary technology and postal infrastructure to manage their occupation of Khotan and other silk road city-states.

The Khotanese were an already well-established silk road civilization, maintaining existing trade relations with the Tibetan Plateau and other regions and a long history of Buddhism. As evidenced in their mythology, they had apparently successfully balanced the competing claims of South and East Asia on their attention.³² Monks from Khotan, perhaps even indigenous Khotanese, settled in the heart of the Tibetan empire by the eighth century at least, and no doubt exerted some influence on the type of Buddhism adopted at the Tibetan court and thereafter used as a form of international language with the surrounding regions.³³ The early imperial Tibetan encounter with an already established cosmopolitan silk road centre may have acted as inspiration to create such a Buddhist society of trade, wealth, and luxury on the Tibetan Plateau. However, their management of the Khotanese differed somewhat from earlier administrations. In contrast to the wooden slips on which were written Kharoṣṭhī in the third and fourth century, these wooden slips were written on in Tibetan in around the eighth century by foreigners as part of the Tibetan military administration of the area from their fort in Mazār Tāgh, north of Khotan. Earlier scholars suggested that the locals held little interest for the Tibetans except as sources of supplies such as grain (barley, wheat, millet, grass, and horse fodder), meat, and dairy products, and that the king of Khotan continued to administer his realm in most matters.³⁴ Against this view, Tsuguhito Takeuchi suggests that the location of the hill stations (*ri zug*) at Mazār Tāgh and at Mīrān, near lake Lop, were outside the population centres of Khotan and the Lop Nor region respectively for sound military reasons.³⁵ This was done to protect Khotan and the southern trade routes against military aggression, at this time especially Uyghur attacks. He concurs that such

30 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 155; Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 7.

31 Compare Skjaervo, “Iranians, Indians,” and Takeuchi, “Tibetan Military System.”

32 Their state founding myth (translated as the *Prophecy of Khotan* in Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts*, 14–43) gives them a blended Indic and Chinese ethnic heritage and narrates methods for solving conflicts between the two great powers on a local level. See also below for the importance of Buddhism in these narratives.

33 Tong, *Silk Roads*, 21–22.

34 Described in Wang (Helen), *Money*, 107.

35 Takeuchi, “Tibetan Military System,” 53.

small kingdoms were able to maintain their own regimes but adds that the Tibetans did not remain aloof—they not only brought their own soldiers from Tibet, Sum pa and Zhang zhung (Chinese: Yangtong) regions to the area but also recruited local Khotanese, Chinese, 'A zha (Tuyuhun) and mThong khyab peoples into the military system.³⁶

Other forms of communication display a rich mixture of northern and northeastern influence on the Tibetans. The Tibetan formulas for writing contracts may have come from Khotan, as much as from China, and were then indigenized under the Yar lung dynasty.³⁷ These appear in paper documents from the late eighth/early ninth century onwards and in turn influenced the contract-writing procedure around Dunhuang (Tibetan: Sha cu) to the east, which was used alongside modified Chinese forms by non-Tibetans for the most part.³⁸ These Tibetan-language contracts, as well as contemporaneous Khotanese sources, reveal that strings of “Chinese, or Chinese-style, coins and grain were the main forms of money during the Tibetan occupation, that coins were used in the purchase of people and livestock, and that grain was used in the purchase of land and property, loans and hiring of labour.”³⁹ Although the use of coins was perhaps more widespread than previously expected, other forms of money were used far more regularly than in China. Monetary use of textiles was much rarer, and this is consistent with a more general shift away from references to carpets or linen (and a fluctuation in references to silk) in documents from eastern central Asia after the mid sixth century.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the Khotanese continued to monetize wool, cotton, hemp, felt, and exceptionally silk (perhaps more often in trade with China rather than Tibet) well into the ninth century.⁴¹

The Northeast

During the reign of Emperor Khri Srong btsan (d. 649 CE), his ministers subjugated the Mi nyag and the Sum pa (Chinese: Supi), the latter of whom had reneged on their former alliance in the northeast.⁴² Their claimed territory did not encompass the whole of the Sum pa region, which probably lay in the upper Mekong basin bordered by the Salween River in the southwest and the Yangtze River in the northeast. Instead, Tibetan-controlled Sum pa abutted and partially overlapped cultural Sum pa in the southwest.⁴³ This area is still included within a list of military districts under Tibetan control thought to reflect the empire around 744–764.⁴⁴ These Sum pas appear to have been peacefully

³⁶ Takeuchi, “Tibetan Military System,” 50.

³⁷ See Takeuchi, *Old Tibetan Contracts*, 118–20.

³⁸ See also Wang, *Money*, 107–13.

³⁹ Wang, *Money*, xv; see also 107–13, based on the evidence amassed in Takeuchi, *Old Tibetan Contracts*.

⁴⁰ Wang, *Money*, xiv–xv and 75–92.

⁴¹ Wang, *Money*, 95–106.

⁴² Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 20–22.

⁴³ Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 12–13.

⁴⁴ Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 10.

incorporated into the Tibetan military infrastructure and been rewarded with ranks superior to those of more outlying and rebellious conquests.⁴⁵ They were probably used as “shock troops” against the Chinese forces, like soldiers from Zhang zhung in the west.⁴⁶ Therefore, the conquest of territory to form the Tibetan empire was not always carried out at the point of a sword or by ruthless subjugation.

In the middle of the seventh century, the Tibetan empire expanded northeast and conquered the 'A zha (Chinese: Tuyuhun), who were based to the west of Kokonor Lake (Chinese: Qinghai Hu) and the southeastern Tarim Basin. The 'A zha were a Turkic kingdom who had been a thorn in the side of both bordering Turkish, Tibetan, and Chinese areas since the fifth century.⁴⁷ Like the Sum pa, perhaps the 'A zha were not degraded by incorporation into the empire. After 663, the 'A zha became a vassal state (*rgyal phran*) of the Yar lung dynasty, as indicated by their performance of a yearly *sku bla* rite of fealty to the emperor, and this status allowed the 'A zha some autonomy within the Tibetan empire.⁴⁸ This area was famed for its horses, and, in return, loose Tibetan control of this region and its animals helped the empire not only to play a role in the lucrative trade of horses along the silk road, making it also a “horse road,” but also to strengthen the Tibetan military with an expanded cavalry.⁴⁹ Half of the 'A zha population were not willing to submit and fled towards China, who provided them with the new province of Anlezhou in Liangzhou. However, the Tibetan army conquered Liangzhou in early 758, and it thereafter became a Tibetan military centre (*khrom*).⁵⁰ The example of 'A zha shows, though, that the options of Tibet's neighbours were not limited to fighting and perishing when they came into contact with the encroaching empire.

Thus, by well-calculated opening forays into the northeast, the Yar lung dynasty was able to seize control of both the economic means and the man- and horse-power necessary to realize their imperial ambitions. As the empire expanded, it became easier for members of friendly states to use travel and trade networks within the Tibetan empire than risk war-torn northern routes. There was, for example, an alternative southern silk route that circumvented Dunhuang, running from Ruoqiang, southeast into Tibetan territory, through Golmud (Chinese: Ge'ermu) and then east past Dulan and Kokonor Lake to Xining and Lanzhou where it met the main route through the Gansu corridor (Chinese: Hexi zoulang).⁵¹ At Dulan, archaeologists have surveyed ancient burial mounds in various states of disrepair due to weather and looting. These sites appear to contain tombs and coffins, painted on the walls of which are indications of the rich connections maintained by the Tibetan empire and perhaps earlier links between Turkic and early

⁴⁵ Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 38n50, 70.

⁴⁶ See Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 10 and 13, and below.

⁴⁷ See Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 17–19.

⁴⁸ Hill, “*Sku-bla* Rite”; Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 40–41.

⁴⁹ Tong, *Silk Roads*, 19.

⁵⁰ Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 40–41.

⁵¹ See Tong, *Silk Roads*, 21, map 3.1.

Tibetan burial culture.⁵² Yet the Yar lung dynasty's expansion into the northeast also brought them increasingly into contact with Tang China.

The East

Tibetan culture was not held in high regard in Chang'an, as reflected in slightly later Chinese sources such as *The Tang History (Tangshu)*.⁵³ Yet the growing military might of the Tibetan empire was undeniable, and it had already represented a potential threat to China from its beginnings during the Sui dynasty period (581–617 CE). However, the Tang's alternatives, like those of their vastly smaller 'A zha neighbours in the northwest, were also not limited to military success or defeat. In 641, Emperor Taizong (598–649 CE) gave Princess Wencheng (Tibetan: Mun chang Kong co) in marriage to the son of Khri Srong btsan, who himself then married her when his son died, in around 646.⁵⁴ *The Old Tang History (Jiu Tangshu)*, deploying a common literary *topos*, records Khri Srong btsan as converting to Chinese culture under Wencheng's influence:

He also discarded his felt and skins, put on brocade and silk, and gradually copied Chinese civilization. He also sent the children of his chiefs and rich men to request admittance into the national schools to be taught the classics, and invited learned scholars from China to compose his official reports to the emperor.⁵⁵

It appears that relative peace reigned at this time. A Chinese embassy passed unharmed across the Tibetan empire to meet with King Harṣa in northern India at least once during this decade (in 643 CE), and they must have been aided by a system of Tibetan post stations along the way.⁵⁶ Shortly after the death of the Indian ruler, Chinese diplomat-pilgrims ran into danger in his capital of Kānyakubja (today Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh) and successfully called the Tibetan army (as well as the Licchavis) to their aid.⁵⁷ This *pax Tibetica* lasted for a few decades of the mid to late seventh century. However, by the eighth century, the Tibetan empire had once again blocked off this ambassadorial route on both sides, and Indian embassies to China between the 690s and 720s had to skirt around Tibetan-controlled territory by the northern silk road to complain to the Tang of the growing intrusion of Arabs and Tibetans into South Asia.⁵⁸

52 Heller, "Archaeological Artifacts."

53 Schaeffer et al., *Sources*, 6–10.

54 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 23n54; Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 22–25.

55 Bushell, "Early History," 445; quoted in Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 11; see also Schaeffer et al., *Sources*, 11–13.

56 Huber, *Holy Land Reborn*, 45; Sen, *Buddhism*, 18–22. However, Tansen Sen (*Buddhism*, 22) suggests that the new spirit of friendliness between the courts of Taizong and Harṣa at this time may have been in part due to distrust on both sides of the ostensibly peaceful intentions of the Yar lung dynasty in between.

57 Huber, *Holy Land Reborn*, 46; Sen, *Buddhism*, 22–23.

58 Sen, *Buddhism*, 24–26.

In 706, the Tibetan empire signed a treaty with the Chinese, followed up around 710 with the marriage of Princess Jincheng (Tibetan: Kim shang Kong co) of the Tang to Prince rGyal gTsong ru (704–ca. 754 CE) who would in 712 be enthroned as Emperor Khri lDe gtsug brtsan.⁵⁹ The *Tang History* narrates events somewhat differently, from a Chinese perspective.⁶⁰ This princess is recorded as bringing not only a wealth of silk wares, musicians, performers, and craftsmen, but also Buddhist accoutrements and clergy.⁶¹ Princess Jincheng's acts on behalf of the dharma could well have been more influential in establishing the religion at the Tibetan court than those performed earlier, during Khri Srong btsan's reign, by his more famous Chinese queen, Wencheng.⁶² Silk, princesses, and perhaps also Buddhism were important parts of Tang-Yar lung diplomacy during the long eighth century. During the period from 634 to 846, it is estimated that the Tang sent sixty-six envoys to the Yar lung, and were sent the same 125 times, and though silk flowed from east to west it was reciprocated from the Tibetan side with lavish metalwork such as golden animal-shaped vessels and grand models of pastoral or cosmopolitan structures.⁶³ Commerce also flowed between the lands, with animals such as horses, sheep, cattle and rare birds, animal products including musk, yak tails, and superior honey, textiles, metalwork, and natural products (e.g., salt, gold, jade, and gemstones) from the west being traded for *inter alia* silk, paper, ink, and perhaps even tea from the east.⁶⁴ This, of course, does not mean that the relationship between the two imperial powers was uniformly peaceful over these 200 years.

The Southeast

Around 750, the Yar lung dynasty strengthened its ties with the Nanzhao (Tibetan: Mywa or 'Jang) kingdom, which consisted of two ethnically diverse groups: the more Sinified majority known to the Tibetans as the "White Mywa" (Mywa dkar po; Chinese: Bai Man) and the ruling elite known as the "Black Mywa" (Mywa nag po; Chinese: Wu Man).⁶⁵ The Nanzhao leadership switched its allegiance between the Tang and the Yar lung dynasties at various points during the long eighth century, but was never accorded parity with either.⁶⁶ In the 750s, the Nanzhao ruler Ge luo feng (Tibetan: Kag la bong; r. 748–779 CE) allied with the Yar lung dynasty and fended off Tang military advances into Nanzhao territory—for which he was rewarded with the title of "emperor younger brother" (*btsan po gcung*).⁶⁷ However, this alliance did not last many years after his death, and in

⁵⁹ The so-called *Old Tibetan Annals'* records for this period are translated in Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 104–9; Schaeffer et al., *Sources*, 47–51.

⁶⁰ Schaeffer et al., *Sources*, 13–16.

⁶¹ Tong, *Silk Roads*, 20.

⁶² Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 19.

⁶³ Tong, *Silk Roads*, 20.

⁶⁴ Beckwith, "Early Medieval *Florissance*," 96–100.

⁶⁵ Backus, *Nan-Chao Kingdom*, 49.

⁶⁶ Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung," 63.

⁶⁷ Uebach, "Tibetan Officials," 53–56; Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung," 64–69.

794 the region returned its allegiance to the Tang.⁶⁸ However, the earliest extant stone inscription in Tibetan dates from the period of positive Yar lung-Nanzhao relations. It was discovered and probably erected at the “first bend of the Yangtze River” in Lijiang district, at a flashpoint of many Yar lung-Nanzhao-Tang territorial disputes.⁶⁹ Its importance for connectivity resides first in its “evidence of the use of Tibetan language in the eighth-century southeastern region of the empire.”⁷⁰ The conversion of some of the local population to the Tibetan language (both spoken and written) is a trait also found in the Tibetan-controlled Dunhuang from the eighth to the ninth century (see below), and suggests an intentional policy of the Yar lung dynasty in addition to being simply a practical option for the conquered population. The *Dehua bei* inscription of 766 and the ninth-century *Old Tibetan Chronicle* also show signs of a mixed Tibetan-Chinese (or Chinese-emulating Tibetan) system of titles granted to loyal officials of Nanzhao acting as ambassadors to the Yar lung court.⁷¹

The second important feature of the Lijiang inscription is as a new form of material support for Tibetan public proclamations in the eighth century, and their use was soon seen throughout the empire. Such stone steles most likely coexisted with proclamations on wooden and paper supports, and perhaps other materials and by oral means with a longer history of use on the Tibetan Plateau.⁷² As discussed above, wooden supports had been used for epistolary and administrative documents since the invention of writing and were probably inspired by their use in Khotan and the silk road. Paper manufacture ranks among the most important technologies introduced during the long eighth century and indicates a balancing eastern influence on Tibetan writing culture. In 648, according to *The New Tang History (Xin Tangshu)*, Emperor Taizong agreed to send artisans skilled in making ink and paper to the Yar lung court, perhaps as part of the spirit of reconciliation at the time.⁷³ In the year 744–745, *The Old Tibetan Annals* records the emperor’s proclamation that paper should replace wooden tallies as a form of record-keeping.⁷⁴ *The Old Tibetan Annals* were probably themselves written on wooden slips first, hence their brevity, and later transferred onto paper.⁷⁵ Helga Uebach argues that this entry provides the earliest extant use of the term “paper” (*shog*) in Tibetan (which is rather late considering the existence of paper production technology in the Tibetan empire since the mid seventh century) and that it suggests a growing literacy among the population of central Tibet at least.⁷⁶ Yet the question of the source(s) of inspiration for the

68 Takata, “Lijiang Inscription,” 165–67 provides a short outline of all these events; see also Bryson, “Tsenpo Chung,” 69–70.

69 See Takata, “Lijiang Inscription”; Uebach, “Tibetan Officials,” 59–62; Bryson, “Tsenpo Chung,” 60–63.

70 Uebach, “Tibetan Officials,” 59.

71 Bryson, “Tsenpo Chung,” 65–66; Uebach, “Tibetan Officials,” 61.

72 See Scherrer-Schaub, “Enacting Words.”

73 Bushell, “Early History,” 446.

74 Uebach, “From Red Tally,” 60; Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 124.

75 Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 10–11.

76 Uebach, “From Red Tally,” 64.

Tibetan imperial stone inscriptions remains unresolved since this practice possesses antecedents in indigenous standing stones and was common not only in China but also in Turkic and Indic areas, and in Nanzhao itself.⁷⁷

The technology of stone pillar construction (and bell founding) and their adornment with artistic and written Tibetan epigraphy became more popular in the Yar lung valley as well as on the borders of the empire from the mid eighth century onwards—sponsored by the emperors, their queens, and their ministers. Stone pillars were used to record treaties between the Tibetan empire and the Tang, proclaim support for state Buddhism, “set in stone” the privileges accorded to the families of loyal ministers, and mark the tombs of the emperors with fitting eulogies to their lives.⁷⁸ This priceless stele corpus was augmented with tablet, wall, and rock inscriptions in the later ninth and tenth centuries, whose content increasingly shifted from imperial proclamations and eulogies of rulers and ministers to Buddhist prayers, mantras, and instructions, representations of deities, and records of the construction of temples and monasteries.⁷⁹

The stone inscriptions begin to appear during the lifetime, or perhaps the reign, of Khri Srong lde brtsan, who ruled over the empire at perhaps its peak of extent and cosmopolitanism. In *The Old Tibetan Annals*, Prince Srong lde brtsan is born into a glorious Tibetan empire in 742. The entry for that year reads:

[742–743] In the year of the horse, in the summer the Btsan po’s court resided in Mtshar-bu-sna. The Chinese emissary An Da-lang and the Black Mywa emissary, La-bri, paid homage. At Zlo they made an account of the [respective] removal and installation of Shud pu Khong-zung and Lang-gro Khong-rtsan. They made a tally of jurisdictions. At Khu-nye Mon-gangs, Minister Mang-po-rje made an administration of ‘A-zha. Btsan po Srong lde brtsan was born at Brag-mar. The mother, [Sna-nam] Mang-mo-rje [Bzhi-steng], died. So one year.⁸⁰

This terse statement displays the imperial Tibetans’ literary debt to China. First, there is the use of the animal cycle to identify years. Second, this annalistic style of recording only the major court events of the year strongly resembles the *benji*, *biannian*, and *nianbiao* styles of literature in China.⁸¹ However, the text also marks time with reference to *Tibetan* imperial power. It records where the older emperor held his court that summer, to distinguish it from other horse years. As Dotson rightly comments, “[i]n this

⁷⁷ See Aldenderfer, “Domestic rDo ring,” on prehistoric standing stones of the Tibetan Plateau. During the imperial period, Hazod (“Stele in the Centre,” 73) argues that the three extant ninth-century tortoise-borne steles are “adoptions of Chinese or Turkic models, whereby the Tibetan example with its crouching posture and the neck slightly pulled back is closer to the “Turkish model,” as represented by the sixth-century CE Turkic Bugut inscription pillar.” In contrast, the complex technology of founding large Buddhist temple bells, with imagery and text in both Tibetan and Indic scripts cast into the bronze, appears to have come from Tang China (where Korean artisans were employed as experts in the art; see Doney, “Temple Bells”).

⁷⁸ See Richardson, *Corpus*; Li and Coblin, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*.

⁷⁹ See Iwao et al., *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, 54–69 and 74–94.

⁸⁰ Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 122–23; square brackets are Dotson’s.

⁸¹ Sørensen, *Foreword*, 1.

way, time itself was centralized by the figure of the Tibetan emperor.”⁸² Furthermore, this account portrays events at the court as evidence of the power of its empire. This entry recounts the homage that the Chinese emissary paid to Emperor Khri lDe gtsug brtsan (704–755 CE), suggesting positive diplomatic relations between the Yar lung and the Tang dynasties at this time. It shows other areas to be under Tibetan control, including the ‘A zha principality. While *The Old Tibetan Annals’* literary style suggests the background cultural influence of China, this entry describes Prince Srong lde brtsan as born into an independent, ordered, and powerful Tibetan empire.

Prince Srong lde brtsan was enthroned as Khri Srong lde brtsan in the summer of 756.⁸³ This coronation brought an end to the rebellion by rival clans, and perhaps temporary overthrow of the Yar lung dynasty, that marked the last year of his father’s reign; thus it ensured the continuation of the dynastic lineage.⁸⁴ The so-called Zhol Inscription records that he rewarded a minister, Ngan lam sTag ra Klu khong, for remaining loyal to the royal institution throughout the uprising and for counselling the emperor in bringing many districts and fortresses of China under subjugation. This inscription also contrasts Tibetan imperial power with that of the inferior and fearful Chinese lord (*rgya rje*; not designated an emperor), Suzong (He’u ’ki wang te; 711–762 CE).⁸⁵

The crowning event of this subjugation was the brief sacking of Chang’an in 763, after the Tang had been weakened by the internal An Lushan (ca. 703–757 CE)/Anxi rebellion of 755, and the deceased Suzong was replaced by his son in 762. *The Old Tibetan Annals* records this event and blames the downfall of the western capital on a lack of respect from the new Chinese emperor, Taizong (727–779 CE):

[762–764] ... The Lord of China having died at the end of winter, [another] Lord of China was newly installed. As he found it unsuitable to offer [Tibet] silk tribute and maps, and so forth, political ties were destroyed, and Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zigs [Shu-theng], Zhang Stong-rtsan and others crossed the iron bridge at Bum-ling. They waged a great campaign. They sacked many Chinese strongholds, such as ‘Bu-shing-kun, Zin-cu, and Ga-cu. Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zigs [Shu-theng] returned to the land of Tibet. Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zigs [Shu-theng], Minister [Ngan lam] Stag-sgra [Klu khong], Zhang Stong-rtsan, Btsan-ba, and others led a military campaign to the capital and sacked the capital. The Lord of China fled, [another] Lord of China was newly appointed, and the military campaign returned. Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zig [Shu-theng] went to Tibet for a great consultation. So one year.⁸⁶

The narrative here does not include a depiction of Khri Srong lde brtsan but rather reflects positively on his reign. This is history written by the victors of this particular

⁸² Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 11.

⁸³ Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 128–29.

⁸⁴ See Beckwith, “Revolt of 755.”

⁸⁵ See Richardson, *Corpus*, 1–25; Li and Coblin, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, 138–85; Doney, “Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva,” 63–69.

⁸⁶ Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 132; square brackets are Dotson’s. As with the invitation of Princess Jincheng (above), the *Tang History* naturally describes the same events somewhat differently (see Schaeffer et al., *Sources*, 16–19).

campaign and glorifies not only the emperor but also the top ministers and generals—against the common enemy of the expanding empire, China. In rewarding Ngan lam sTag ra Klu khong for his part in this victory, the Zhol inscription thereby also portrays Khri Srong lde brtsan as a powerful and generous emperor. Like *The Old Tibetan Annals*, the Zhol inscription questions the character of Tibet's neighbouring ruler to compliment the Tibetan emperor's strengths by comparison.⁸⁷

The subsequent Yar lung-Tang treaty of 783 laid less of an emphasis on Tang superiority and brought a reduction in open hostilities between the two powers.⁸⁸ However, the truce was soon broken by the Tang, and the two sides became antagonistic once more.⁸⁹ Only the treaty of 821/822, the final of seven agreements between the Yar lung and Tang dynasties, was "the first one in which the political co-equality between the two powers was also recognized by the Chinese side" as evidenced by the unique way in which the Treaty Inscription of 823 is written.⁹⁰ It initiated a longer period of peace between the two empires, but the Yar lung dynasty fell soon after and perhaps was already unable to exert great military pressure on the Tang due to internal problems. The Tibetan empire could not expand far to the direct south, due to the mighty Himalayan range. Having introduced above the Yar lung dynasty's early connections with India and the Licchavis in what is today Nepal (a topic I shall pick up again with reference to Buddhism below), I shall instead move on in clockwise fashion to discuss the western regions.

The West

In the southwest, a number of large and small kingdoms fell to the Tibetan empire at various times during the long eighth century, although some of the more outlying areas were always under threat of independent rebellion or return to Chinese control.⁹¹ Zhang zhung bordered Tibetan and Turkic territories and was culturally and economically connected with central Tibet long before it was officially linked through the wedding of its ruler, Lig myi rhya, with the sister of Khri Srong btsan in the early to mid seventh century.⁹² Yet this marriage alliance, and the ambassadorial power that Princess

⁸⁷ Doney, "Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva," 68.

⁸⁸ It is described according to the *Tang History* in Schaeffer et al., *Sources*, 19–21.

⁸⁹ See Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 149ff.

⁹⁰ Hazod, "Stele in the Centre," 41. Kazushi Iwao ("Organisation of the Chinese") goes further, claiming that the Yar lung dynasty showed signs of taking a superior position to the Tang even in the 783 treaty and actually led the 821/822 treaty negotiations.

⁹¹ See Denwood, "Tibetans in the West," 10–15.

⁹² Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 20. On Map 8 (p. 192), Zhang zhung has a relatively small extent compared with its representation in Denwood, "Tibetans in the West," 21, for instance, where it extends farther east along the gTsang po river and north to the southern border of the uninhabited Northern Plain (Byang thang). See Zeisler, "East of the Moon," 379–407, for further discussion, a problematization of the simple identification of Zhang zhung and Yangtong, and the argument that at least Upper Ladakh may have also fallen within one of these two overlapping tribal units.

Sad mar kar held there, led to the Yar lung dynasty claiming Zhang zhung in 649, after which it rebelled in 677–678, was annexed in 679, and finally subdued between 744 and 764.⁹³ After this, they were used as “shock troops” like the Sum pa in the northeast. Probably even more Zhang zhung territory was subsumed into the Tibetan empire than Sum pa areas.⁹⁴

Thus, the Tibetan emperors of the seventh and eighth centuries possessed at most times the manpower and taxable land necessary to expand even further into the west and north. However, this meant facing the strong Tang and Arabic forces expanding in opposite directions along the silk road during this period.⁹⁵ In the west, the growing Tibetan empire met and incorporated largely Dardic-speaking Indo-Aryan groups.⁹⁶ Philip Denwood suggests that Baltistan, southeast of Gilgit, became a Tibetan territory before 704; Great Palūr, which was centred around the Gilgit basin itself (and perhaps stretching south to bordering Uḍḍiyāna to the southwest), then fell under Tibetan control around 726.⁹⁷ Finally, Little Palūr (Tibetan: Bru zha) in the Yasin Valley, northwest of Gilgit (and north of Greater Palūr), was perhaps conquered by Tibetan troops in the 730s, but was returned into Chinese hands by Gao Xianzhi in 747.⁹⁸ Bettina Zeisler has more recently questioned some of Denwood’s findings, and the issue of the names and extents of these western territories during the long eighth century remains a thorny issue.⁹⁹ However, it is clear that the important north–south trade routes of the region now known as Ladakh at various points came under the control of the Yar lung dynasty, who capitalized on the wealth flowing through this area. Inscriptions found in the Ladkhi region and dating from the imperial period are written in many languages and scripts, including Tibetan, Sogdian, Tocharian, Arabic, Chinese, and Śāradā (Kashmiri), and thus reflect the diversity of those living in and travelling through the western part of the Tibetan empire.¹⁰⁰ Kashmir was a centre of learning, and there is evidence that intellectual traditions, especially medical classics that were translated into both Tibetan and Arabic translations, were sourced from this region.¹⁰¹ Kashmir also maintained its own independent relationship with Tang China at this time, serving (when it was

93 Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 25–26; Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 10.

94 Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 10.

95 Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 18–19.

96 Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 5.

97 Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 14–15.

98 Denwood, “Tibetans in the West,” 14.

99 See Zeisler, “East of the Moon.” One issue raised by Zeisler (416–25) concerns Map 8 (p. 192). This map shows a region marked “gSer-rigs?” (“Gold Clan”; Sanskrit *Suvarṇagotra*; Chinese: *Jinshi*), which Zeisler points out may more likely designate a people or race than a geographical area—one was given different domains in different sources (specifically farther northeast or farther south than is shown on our map depending on Khotanese and Indian sources respectively).

100 My thanks to Quentin Devers for this information.

101 See Yoeli-Tlalim, “Islam and Tibet,” 4; Bladel, “Bactrian Background,” 76–77.

not disrupted by war) as an avenue for the former to complain to the latter about both Tibetan and Arabic incursions.¹⁰²

Tibetan rule over northwestern regions also brought the Tibetan army increasingly into contact with Iranian areas to the west (sTag gzig/Ta zig, Par sig/Pa ra si ka).¹⁰³ One event that is writ (over)large in the global history of this period is the so-called Battle of Talas (751 CE), in which it is claimed the ‘Abbāsīd Arabs, Qarluq Türks, and Tibetans together withstood the Chinese forces at the height of Tang power, halting their westward expansion for good (and introducing paper-making to Baghdad through the artisanal skills of Chinese captured in the process).¹⁰⁴ This battle actually seems to have taken place in the town of Aṭlach nearby Talas (Arabic: Ṭarāz) on the present-day border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and no Tibetan evidence is available to prove that the Tibetan army took part.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps some local rulers affiliated to the Tibetans helped the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, or the Tibetan army independently engaged Tang forces around Kashgar (conceivably forcing the western arm of the Tang forces to fight on two fronts). Warfare between the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate and the Yar lung dynasty is reported in the early ninth century, in which the latter are allied with the Qarluq Türks who appear to have helped the Tibetan armies extend surprisingly far west, and even to have controlled regions around the Pamirs in present-day Tajikistan at times.

The expansion of the Tibetan empire into Kashmir and beyond seems to have obstructed the flow of direct trade from India to western and largely Muslim regions. Trade was not stopped completely but forced to go through “Tibet.” It is difficult to know when this occurred since we can only rely on an anonymous and terse geographical account in Persian from 982 (which may quote an earlier witness), the *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam min al-Mashriq ila l-Maghrib* (*The Boundaries of the World from the East to the West*). It states: “all goods from India come to Tibet, and from Tibet come to the cities of the Muslims.”¹⁰⁶ However, the Yar lung dynasty was not only militarily involved in the west but also continued a probably long-standing trade relation with Western Regions. This included the Tibetan export of musk, sheep products and wool, cloth, and slaves into Iranian areas, as well as iron and steel products such as chain mail and swords.¹⁰⁷ Reciprocally, examples of eastern Iranian precious metalwork seem to have also been imported from the late seventh century onwards, influencing the style of central Tibetan gold ware.¹⁰⁸ Such Tibetan-Iranian designed gold ware may also have been among the gifts sent to Chang’an (see above), and so complemented the works sent directly from regions west of Tibet to China over the northern silk road.

102 See Sen, *Buddhism*, 24–32 on this relationship.

103 See Yoeli-Tlalim, “Islam and Tibet,” 1–8.

104 See, for example, Brunn et al., *Routledge Atlas*, 17.

105 See Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 138–41. However, absence of evidence is not a proof of their non-involvement, and Tibetan sources are admittedly exceptional sparse around this particular year.

106 *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, 73, quoted in Melikan-Chirvani, “Iran to Tibet,” 93; see also Heller, “Indian Style.”

107 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 109–10n4.

108 Melikan-Chirvani “Iran to Tibet,” 97–104.

Buddhism as a State Religion

Along with imperial control of these western and northwestern areas came a flow of Buddhist traders and artisans into the Yar lung Valley that served to enrich the court's religious material culture. The Yar lung court may have been in contact or familiar with Nestorian Christianity, more properly known as the Church of the East, and Manichaeism, but it was Buddhism that became a state religion in the eighth century.¹⁰⁹ As mentioned above, the empire had entered the Kashmir and Gilgit regions and subsequently defended them constantly as a military force, attracted to the area for its economic benefits. As Kapstein notes, "[i]ronically, therefore, war and booty were among the conditions that facilitated the eventual Tibetan adoption of Buddhism."¹¹⁰ Amy Heller discusses Kashmiri-Tibetan relationships during the eighth century, when access between northeast India and China was cut off due to Tibetan military expansion onto the southern silk road:

There was constant and strong support for Buddhism at the Lhasa court during the first half of the eighth century, and many statues from Kashmir and Gilgit were imported into Central Tibet and then carried throughout the regions under Tibetan sovereignty, including Khotan and Dunhuang. Early Tibetan monks greatly esteemed the Buddhist art of neighbouring regions, particularly Kashmir, Nepal, Bengal and Bihar, and actively acquired and emulated it.¹¹¹

Thus, southwestern influence in central Tibet was balanced by that of artisans from the Kathmandu Valley due to the connections between the Yar lung and Newar Licchavi rulers.¹¹² In addition, the impact that control over northeastern regions had on imperial-period aesthetics should not be forgotten. Other pieces of art from central Tibet show the Central Asian style holding sway within the artistic depiction of Buddhist themes under imperial patronage, even sometimes displayed together with evidence of the Kashmiri style.¹¹³ These diverse ingredients all contributed to the Tibetan Buddhist style which emerged during this time and matured over the proceeding centuries.

Although Buddhist priests and artists may have been present at the Tibetan court and patronized by its emperors during the seventh century, the late eighth century marks a watershed moment for the institution of Buddhism in the Tibetan empire. The ascendancy of the empire allowed the emperor to confer high status, patronage, and support on the Buddhist institution of ordained monks (the *samgha*). On the famous stele that still stands outside bSam yas monastery in what was the heart of the empire, Khri Srong lde brtsan proclaims that such patronage "shall never be abandoned or destroyed," as well as provide the wealth that makes the "provision of the necessary accoutrements"

109 See Uray, "Tibet's Connections."

110 Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 65.

111 Heller, "Indian Style," 19, col. ii.

112 See Linrothe, "Origins of the Kashmiri"; van Schaik, "A New Look," 72–75.

113 Lojda et al., "Tibetan Himalayan Style," 121–29.

possible.¹¹⁴ The donee is not a specific person or clan (as in the Zhol Inscription, above) but rather monastic followers of Buddhism. The bSam yas Inscription draws on certain rhetorical devices used in earlier secular proclamations, for instance the Zhol Inscription, to evoke both imperial expansion and the stability of the dynastic lineage. It uses these rhetorical *topoi* to lend authority to Buddhism. Reciprocally, the ministers who swore to protect this newly established state religion also thereby pledged their continued loyalty to the Yar lung dynasty, and the imperially sponsored construction of large temple structures centralized the generally itinerant power base of the empire around the two “capitals,” Ra sa (later to be named Lhasa) and Brag dmar (further south-east where bSam yas stands). The circular *maṇḍala* symbolism inherent in the design of bSam yas monastery reflects the ideal empire, with the emperor identified with the powerful cosmic Buddha (Vairocana) at its centre—as at other imperially sponsored Buddhist sites in East Asia more generally during this period.¹¹⁵

Foreign Buddhist teachers also played a strong part in the spread of Buddhism throughout the late eighth-century Tibetan empire. For example, the ruling emperor, Khri Srong lde brtsan, provides an almost first-person royal explanation (*bka' mchid*) of the background to his (re)establishment of Buddhism as a state religion once he gained power in 756. He describes internal antagonism, on the part of some disloyal ministers, to the “southern” religion that had been patronized by the Yar lung dynasty since the time of his forefathers. He goes on to say that, after reading augurs suggesting the folly of such anti-Buddhist feeling, he invited a “spiritual friend” (*dge ba'i bshes gnyen*; Sanskrit: *kalyāṇamitra*) to teach him the dharma, who is most likely the Buddhist Madhyamaka master, Śāntarakṣita (d. 788?).¹¹⁶ According to this explanation, the emperor then spread (or perhaps imposed) the religion throughout his empire, in the west as far as Zhang zhung and Little Palūr and in the east up to the “bDe blon khams” area that included Dunhuang and more besides, by councils held with his loyal nobility (including the preferentially treated lords of the 'A zha).¹¹⁷ He thereby apparently succeeded by and large in realizing his intention to grant all Tibetans access to Buddhist liberation from the mundane world of suffering (*saṃsāra*).¹¹⁸ Buddhism probably had little wider influence on Tibetan *cultural* practices beyond the court, unlike the transformations it wrought from the post-imperial period onwards.¹¹⁹ Yet, even if

114 See Richardson, *Corpus*, 26–29; Li and Coblin, *Tibetan Inscriptions*, 186–92; Doney, “Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva,” 69–72.

115 Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 71–72; Doney, “Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva,” 71.

116 See Doney, “Narrative Transformations,” 311–12.

117 See Richardson, “First Tibetan,” 92–93; Doney, “Narrative Transformations,” 313.

118 van Schaik, “Tibetan Buddhism,” 59–62. Later Tibetan histories recount that one of the pious Buddhist sons of Khri Srong lde brtsan, Mu ne btsan po, also attempted (and failed) thrice to liberate his poorer subjects from the financial inequalities of the Tibetan social system by levelling the difference between rich and poor (see Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, 404–5). However, this can be neither proved nor falsified on the basis of the (admittedly almost non-existent) contemporaneous or proximate sources on this early ninth-century period of Tibetan imperial history.

119 See most recently Doney, “Narrative Transformations.”

the spread of Buddhism itself throughout the empire was more rhetorical or real, the idea of this spread was important in part because it reflected positively on the Yar lung dynasty's power over their realm. The identification of Buddhism as a state religion and the emperor as Buddha Vairocana may also have facilitated relations between the Yar lung dynasty and rulers of surrounding states, which made similar claims around this time. Unfortunately, we lack concrete evidence such as written communications between these rulers that would corroborate such a hypothesis.¹²⁰

A mass translation exercise funded and led by imperial power formed part of the process of establishing Tibetan Buddhism.¹²¹ By the ninth century, this created a quite substantial royal library (catalogued in the *Ihan kar ma* and *'Phang thang ma* catalogues) that may have been emulating either the monastic libraries of Nālandā and Dunhuang or the royal libraries of Chang'an, among others.¹²² When Buddhist texts were translated during the eighth century (or possibly also the seventh), they *were* translated. A path not taken would have been to simply copy the works in their original languages and make Sanskrit or some Prakrit the priestly or scholarly language at the Tibetan court. Instead, there is evidence that the earliest translations relied more on the transcription of key Buddhist terminology than later translators did. In this, they resembled the early Chinese translators of *Mahāyāna* Buddhist *sūtras*, for example Lokakṣema's (Zhi Loujiachen, second century) translation committee.¹²³ Nevertheless, the general trend was to translate these works, which suggests that the Tibetan language (which had only recently been written down itself) was considered worthy of communicating instructions for enlightenment. Perhaps this is an indication of the very difference of Tibeto-Burman to the Indic language so that it was believed that Sanskritization would not properly achieve the aim of spreading the dharma among the Tibetans. Alternatively, it speaks to the self-importance felt by the Yar lung dynasty at the time, who spread Tibetan language as it spread its empire and felt that Tibetan could also be the language of Buddhism.

Slowly, Buddhist translation literature began to change the Tibetan language. In this way, the Tibetans have followed a general linguistic trend among states that convert to a new religion, including lexical borrowing, loan translation/calque, free translation and periphrasis, and loan shifts in inherited lexemes. For example, the early neologism for scripture(s) itself in Tibetan is *dar ma*, either an approximation of the Sanskrit word *dharma* or a borrowing of a Prakrit word **darma(?)*, which means the same thing. The emperors took a leading role in the production of Tibetan scripture and even disseminated a series of authoritative guides to the translation of Sanskrit, Pāli and perhaps also some northeastern Indic dharmic languages (*rgya gar skad*, lit. "Indian language") into Tibetan calque translation

120 However, see below on Khotanese and Mi nyag representations of the Tibetan emperors as bodhisattvas—emanating from the borders of the empire if not from outside.

121 See Scherrer-Schaub, "Enacting Words."

122 See Herrmann-Pfandt, *Die Lhan kar ma*; Halkias, "Tibetan Buddhism Registered"; Wang, *Money*, 220–23.

123 Harrison, "Earliest Chinese Translations"; my thanks to Sam van Schaik for pointing out this similarity.

terms.¹²⁴ For instance, Skt. *tathāgata*, “thus-gone” (an epithet for the Buddha), was translated literally as *de bzhin gshegs pa* (“thus gone”); whereas Sanskrit. *arhat* (meaning “venerable one”) became *dgra bcom pa* (literally “one who conquers the enemy”), which is based on a received (false) Indic etymology, but nevertheless attempts to do justice to the believed original meaning of the term in the source language.¹²⁵ The neologisms that were created for the truly astounding wealth of translations produced over the long eighth century have become part of the language. So *de bzhin gshegs pa* has become a standard Tibetan epithet for the Buddha, whether or not Tibetans either realize it translates *tathāgata* or not, or think much about what the individual parts of the Tibetan term mean.

The influx of Indic Buddhism exerted a great influence on Tibetan culture, introducing new notions of virtue, concepts such as *karma* and rebirth, sophisticated methods of philosophical reasoning, and advice on how to follow the ideal of dharmic kingship among others.¹²⁶ Other aspects of the south Asian poetic and narrative traditions that entered Tibetan culture with the translation of all sorts of literature, and their indigenous transformations over time, are also undeniable.¹²⁷ However, we should not ignore the translations into Tibetan from Chinese, from Khotanese or from other Prakrits that appear to have been undertaken without the production of imperially edicted guidance.¹²⁸ At least one bilingual Tibetan-Chinese (or Chinese-Tibetan) lexicon of technical Buddhist vocabulary exists in Dunhuang, but it is difficult to date, and its authorship and intended audience remain debated.¹²⁹ Other manuscripts from the imperial period and later suggest that Chan Buddhism (Tibetan: bSam gtan), which in Japan is known as Zen, was popular in Tibetan translation too.¹³⁰

From Khotanese, at least in part, the Yar lung dynasty appears to have learned something of how to be a bodhisattva king, a royal figure bringing his subjects to the path towards enlightenment.¹³¹ In the *Prophecy of Khotan* (*Li yul gyi lung bstan pa*), translated from Khotanese into Tibetan during the imperial period, the founder and first ruler of Khotan is the miraculous child of the great Indian Buddhist king, Aśoka, and his chief consort.

124 Doney, “Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva”; Scherrer-Schaub, “Enacting Words.”

125 Hill, “Languages,” 919, col. ii.

126 See, for instance, Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 381–526; Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel*, 1–35; Walter, *Buddhism and Empire*, 165–285.

127 A good source of references for further reading is Roesler, “Narrative: Tibet.”

128 See Stein, “Tibetica Antiqua”; Silk, “Out of the East”; Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts*.

129 See Apple and Apple, “Pelliot tibétain 1257,” on this document from the Mogao cave 17 near Dunhuang, Pelliot tibétain 1257, which is now held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. Apple and Apple argue that it is a copy of a document somewhat like a questionnaire, in which Tibetans sought from Chinese monasteries to discover the Chinese equivalents of Tibetan calque translation terms that they were already using in their translations.

130 See van Schaik, *Tibetan Chan Manuscripts*. Two other Mogao cave 17 documents (now held in the British Library), IOL Tib J 709/9 and IOL Tib J 667, together make up a treatise on Chan Buddhism that the work itself says had been authorized under the seal of Khri Srong lde brtsan. This treatise thus alludes to his activity as patron of the dharma coming from China as well as India.

131 Doney, “Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva,” 29–36.

He is also born displaying the physical signs (*lakṣana*) of a great being, such as webbed hands and feet, a long tongue and sheathed genitalia. He is cast away to die by exposure but then rescued by the kingly Buddhist deity Vaiśravaṇa and adopted as the son of a Chinese emperor, “a great bodhisattva,” before eventually leaving and discovering Khotan. The narrative then identifies the next, perhaps also mythic, generation of Khotanese royalty as bodhisattvas, while future *arhats* and religious helpers of the kings are described as emanations of celestial *tatāgathas* and bodhisattvas.¹³²

Another text, the ninth- or tenth-century *Prophecy of the Khotanese Arhat* (*Li yul gyi sgra bcom pas lung bstan pa*) speaks of an unnamed Tibetan emperor as an emanation of a celestial bodhisattva—one who inhabits a higher plain of existence but helps beings in this world through his emanations.¹³³ This emperor is depicted as spreading the dharma throughout the Tibetan empire and giving a boost to Khotan’s efforts too:

At that time the king of the Red Faced Ones will use their great power and strength to seize and hold numerous countries belonging to others. Then a bodhisattva will take birth as the king of the Red Faced Ones and the practice of the true dharma will come to the land of Tibet. Scholars and sūtric scriptures will be brought from other countries, and then temples and stūpas will be built and the two kinds of sangha established in the Land of the Red Faced Ones. Then everyone, including the king and ministers, will practice the true dharma.¹³⁴

I have argued elsewhere that this description conforms more closely to the Tibetan eulogistic form of the Old Tibetan inscriptions, which ascribes both militaristic and religious accomplishments to its Buddhist emperors, than to the depictions in the *Prophecy of Khotan* above.¹³⁵ Whereas the period of loose Tibetan control over Khotan influenced the Yar lung dynasty’s depiction of themselves as bodhisattva kings, perhaps here is evidence of the effect of the Tibetans on the Khotanese depiction of their new masters, who in earlier pre-conquest narratives are described as barbarian aggressors along with the Uyghurs, Türks, and Sum pas.¹³⁶

Dunhuang and the Lasting Influence of the Tibetan Empire

There is epigraphic evidence further east of the depiction of Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan as a bodhisattva who allowed his subjects to enter the path towards enlightenment. In Brag lha mo Rock Inscription A, inscribed to the southeast of what is today Jyekundo (sKye dgu mdo; Chinese: Jiegu zhen) in the eastern part of the Tibetan empire, a high-status member or even ruler of the Mi nyag ethnic group—a substantial portion

132 The *Prophecy of Khotan* is translated in Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts*, 14–47.

133 See Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts*, 73–87; van Schaik, “Red Faced Barbarians.”

134 Translated in van Schaik, “Red Faced Barbarians,” 56.

135 Doney, “Early Bodhisattva-Kingship,” 32–33; Doney, “Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva,” 75–76 and 78.

136 See Belanger, “Some Preliminary Remarks”; van Schaik, “Red Faced Barbarians,” 48–52.

of the later Tangut region which was allied to the Yar lung dynasty during the second half of the eighth century—proclaims:¹³⁷

During the reign of the emperor, the bodhisattva, Khri Srong lde brtsan [his] merit was great. After that authority (literally, “secure helmet”) spread to the borders in the ten directions, [Khri Srong lde brtsan] was inspired and codified many *Mahāyāna sūtra* scriptures. Over a thousand [people], including Me nyag—rgyal, entered the path of liberation. [He?] extensively built the—monastery, and the subjects and—offered support. The sacred teachings—[He?] accepted the *Mahāyāna* and firmly maintained [it].¹³⁸

Brag lha mo Rock Inscription A is difficult to date accurately, but appears to fall within the period of Mi nyag alliance to the Yar lung dynasty (also corresponding roughly to the reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan, 756–ca. 800 CE). The rock is also situated in land controlled by the latter at that time. The inscription describes the recent spread of Buddhism throughout the Mi nyag ethnic area, using the symbolism of the spread of empire and giving bodhisattva Khri Srong lde brtsan the credit for their conversion.

The text of the inscription is written in Tibetan rather than in a local Mi nyag language, but it also records the names of a local nobleman or ruler and monastery. This suggests that the text of the inscription was a locally authorized rather than centrally created and sent out to Brag lha mo to be proclaimed there. Perhaps this use of Tibetan is further evidence of the impact of the empire in the provinces, as with the southeastern Lijiang inscription above. Furthermore, the mention of the emperors as bodhisattvas accords with their description in the *Prophecy of the Khotanese Arhat* from the northern part of the empire. If Khri Srong lde brtsan evidently intended to spread Buddhism (and hence his own self-representation as a Buddhist ruler) to the edges of his realm within his lifetime, here we have proof that this was achieved, at least rhetorically in the eyes of some of the elites of the subject polities.

From 787 to 848, the Tibetan empire ruled over Dunhuang, belonging to the Guazhou Province (Tibetan: Kwa chu khrom) with its base in the Guazhou oasis, 15 kilometres to the east of Dunhuang.¹³⁹ This area was pivotal for trade and connectivity, since here the northern and southern silk roads came together before entering the Gansu corridor that led to Liangzhou and Chang’an. Gertraud Taenzer explains how the Tibetan administration split the inhabitants into civil and military units, the former paying taxes and remaining relatively untouched by Tibetan culture and the latter in addition performing *corvée* labour (including recruitment as soldiers) and more often taking on Tibetan names.¹⁴⁰ The area was primarily Buddhist, and military units included some monks who became military citizens (though perhaps not soldiers). Regional councils (*‘dun sa/tsa*) administered both the general “bDe blon khams” area and the more specific Kwa cu military district that included Dunhuang, and gradually new rules were

137 See Heller, “Buddhist Images”; Doney, “Early Bodhisattva-Kingship,” 36–39.

138 Doney, “Early Bodhisattva-Kingship,” 37.

139 Taenzer, “Changing Relations,” 19.

140 See Taenzer, “Changing Relations,” 20–22; for more on the geographical divisions, see Iwao, “Reconsidering the Sino-Tibetan.”

introduced for the Tibetan government of both monastic and lay organizations, altering the already existing structures but with a relatively light touch.¹⁴¹

Inhabitants of the area came from diverse ethnic backgrounds and Dunhuang was visited by embassies, armies, pilgrims, and merchants from many more lands during the long eighth century. Works found at the beginning of the twentieth century at the Mogao cave complex near Dunhuang, walled up in Cave 17 or the so-called “library cave,” are written in Chinese, Khotanese, Sanskrit, Sogdian, Tibetan, Uyghur, and other languages. They include important works such as *The Old Tibetan Annals* and Chan Buddhist works described above. During the Tibetan occupation, many monastic and lay inhabitants of the region worked as scribes for grand *sūtra* copying projects undertaken by Emperor Khri gTsong lde brtsan in the ninth century. There they worked in both Tibetan and Chinese on such classic outlines of the bodhisattva path and the “perfection of [Buddhist] wisdom” (*prajñāpāramitā*) as the *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Tibetan) and *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Chinese), as well as the *Aparimitāyurnāma-mahāyānasūtra* (Tibetan and Chinese) that lies closer to the tantric Buddhism of spells (*dhāraṇī*) and liberation in this lifetime.¹⁴² Taenzer suggests that the relationship between the Yar lung dynasty and Dunhuang was at first amicable, and that local officials were well rewarded with official duties, titles (though never higher than Tibetans), and exemption from conscription and taxes.¹⁴³ Not only the above copied *sūtras*, but also other ritual texts and prayers dating from the period of Tibetan control over Dunhuang are dedicated to increase the merit or lifespan of the Tibetan emperor.¹⁴⁴

When the empire began to collapse in the mid ninth century, it gave up control of Guazhou and Dunhuang to the local Zhang (848–ca. 915 CE).¹⁴⁵ In this uprising, the private army of Zhang Yichao (d. 872 CE) was aided by the clergyman Hongbian (Tibetan: Hong pen; d. 862/868 CE) to whose memory the walled up “library cave” at Mogao was originally dedicated.¹⁴⁶ Some scholars have even suggested that Buddhism was at the root of the general implosion of the Tibetan empire.¹⁴⁷ Others instead see the process working in the opposite direction: economic bankruptcy of the empire having an effect on both its previous expansion and also its ability to fund the monastic institutions, including at Dunhuang.¹⁴⁸ Many on either side of this debate maintain that Buddhism in central Tibet was exclusively a religion centred around the emperor at his court and not shared by all (with the attendant effects on literacy that this may have had), whereas others dispute this view.¹⁴⁹ All serious scholars now agree that there is

141 Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, 69; Taenzer, “Changing Relations,” 27–35.

142 See Dotson, “Remains of the Dharma.”

143 Taenzer, “Changing Relations,” 26 and 21n4.

144 Rather than, say, the Tang emperor; see for example, Chen, “Multiple Traditions,” 249–52.

145 Taenzer “Changing Relations,” 19.

146 Taenzer “Changing Relations,” 35–37; Imaeda, “Provenance and Character.”

147 Hazod, “Tribal Mobility,” 48; Ramble, “Sacral Kings,” 133.

148 Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 77–79; Beckwith, “Central Eurasian Culture Complex,” 233.

149 van Schaik, “Tibetan Buddhism,” 62.

certainly no evidence that Buddhism in central Tibet or at Dunhuang or other outlying parts of the empire suffered from the mythical anti-Buddhist persecution by Khri 'U'i dum brtan (also known as Glang Dar ma; r. 841–842 CE) that once held a firm place in the historical imagination of Tibetan Buddhist tradition and Tibetan Studies. The evidence instead suggests that the emperors stayed Buddhist to the end.¹⁵⁰

When 'U'i Dum brtan was violently killed in 842, his assassination meant the beginning of the end of the Tibetan empire. Hazod suggests that this incident happened at the site of the 821/822 Treaty Inscription, "in the same side valley of the Skyid chu [just east of Lhasa] where the kingdom had been founded 250 years earlier."¹⁵¹ Towards the very end of the dominance of Tibetan empire, Yar lung dynastic power became split between two rival factions and then disintegrated into what later histories call the "time of fragmentation" (*sil bu'i dus*).¹⁵² Although Tibet's glory days of empire were behind it, their effects continued to be felt.

Christopher Beckwith states that historians, Sinologists, and even Tibetologists of thirty years ago mistakenly held that the Tibetan empire had little effect on world history, whereas it perhaps had some limited impact (through its Buddhism) from the Yuan period onwards.¹⁵³ Beckwith played an important role in correcting those misconceptions, especially in highlighting the cultural consequences of the Tibetan imperial expansion for Buddhism in relation to Islam in the late first millennium.¹⁵⁴ More recent works have reinforced this new perspective, for example those scholars drawing on the Dunhuang corpus that shows the long-lasting influence of Tibetan as both an international and a local *lingua franca* among Chinese and Khotanese across all sorts of genres of communication.¹⁵⁵ The abiding impact of Tibetan tantric Buddhism among East and Central Asian devotees has also received increasing attention. It has become clear that Tibetan tantric Buddhism played a role in the imperial *florissence* among other kingdoms such as the Ordos, Uyghur, and Tangut peoples, the latter of whom would later play their own part in world history in their relations with the Mongol Yuan dynasty.¹⁵⁶ In the west too, the wake of empire was still felt after it sunk under its own weight in the mid ninth century. Ladakh in northern India has remained culturally Tibetan up to modern times, and the Gu ge kingdom of mNga' ris in western Tibet (tenth to seventeenth century) proudly charted its royal lineage back to the "bodhisattva kings" of the Yar lung dynasty.¹⁵⁷ Although the silk road gradually lost its

150 van Schaik, "Tibetan Buddhism," 63.

151 Hazod, "Stele in the Centre," 77.

152 See Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 81–85, on this decline; Dalton, *Taming of the Demons*, on the "time of fragmentation."

153 Beckwith, "Ordos and North China," 3.

154 Beckwith, "Ordos and North China," 7.

155 Takeuchi, "Sociolinguistic Implications."

156 Takeuchi, "Old Tibetan Buddhist Texts"; van Schaik, "Tibetan Buddhism"; van Schaik, "Red Faced Barbarians," 58–61; Beckwith, "Ordos and North China."

157 Kapstein, *Tibetans*, 90–91; Doney, "Early Bodhisattva-Kingship," 44–47.

once-mighty dominion over east–west trade, due to the booming of maritime commercial routes from the ninth century onwards, the Tibetan empire’s expansion at the tail end of the great silk/horse/musk road period had a long-lasting impact on Central Asia for centuries to come.¹⁵⁸

Acknowledgements

This contribution was researched and written with funding from the European Research Council while employed by the project “Beyond Boundaries: Religion, Region, Language and the State,” ERC Synergy Project 609823 ASIA. I would like to thank Quentin Devers, Emanuela Garatti, Erik Hermans, and Sam van Schaik for their helpful comments to an early draft of this contribution.

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158 See Nicolas, “Gongs, Bells Cymbals,” 62–63, on the importance of maritime trade routes in Asian history.

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Chapter 9

INNER ASIA

Michael R. Drompp

THE EARLY MIDDLE Ages in Inner Asia coincide with the era of the political hegemony of the early Turkic peoples—particularly the Türks¹ (Chinese: Tujue) and Uyghurs (Chinese: Huihe, Huihu)—throughout the region. The polities they established had their origins on the Mongolian Plateau and expanded from there in multiple directions to interact with various sedentary powers, including China, Korea, Persia, Byzantium, and the kingdoms of the Tarim Basin and Transoxiana.² Through war, trade, and diplomacy they helped shape Eurasia during the Early Middle Ages and exercised significant influence in terms of their military and political interactions as well as economic and cultural exchanges from the establishment of Türk power in 552 to the collapse of the Uyghurs in 840.

The Turkic peoples inhabiting the Inner Asian steppes were primarily pastoral nomads whose economy was based on their herds of sheep, goats, and horses supplemented by smaller numbers of cattle and Bactrian camels. Agriculture, albeit on a relatively small scale, was also an important activity for those who lived in amenable habitats, primarily river valleys. This economy was supplemented by goods obtained from neighbouring peoples, both nomadic and sedentary; acquisition could be through trade or seizure by force or the threat of force.³ Living in large tents made of broad pieces of felt wrapped and tied around wooden lattice frameworks, the pastoral Turkic peoples normally nomadized in established and recognized seasonal patterns but were also capable of rapid movement when needed. Their way of life gave them a level of military skill and preparedness that allowed for the swift mobilization of an effective cavalry.⁴ This did not mean, however, that they were not vulnerable to attack from other powers.

The Türks and Uyghurs were not the first pastoral nomadic peoples of Inner Asia to create far-flung empires, but they are the first whose ethno-linguistic identity is known thanks to stone inscriptions that they created in their language (Old Turkic) in a script

1 Some scholars refer to these as the *Kök/Gök* (“Blue”) Türks to distinguish them from other peoples calling themselves Turk/Türk. The term comes from the eighth-century Old Turkic inscriptions. Although it is not used with any regularity there, the term intentionally links the Türks with the blue sky or Heaven (Old Turkic *Kök Tengri*) and hence the supreme god (also called *Tengri*) who dwells there. See Roux, “Religion des Turcs.”

2 For the geographic location of the most important regions and places mentioned in this chapter, see Map 17.

3 On the Inner Asian pastoralist economy, see Khazanov, *Nomads*, 15–84.

4 See May, “Inner Asian Nomad Army.”

devised especially for its expression.⁵ They thus are the earliest known Inner Asian nomads to leave native sources. However challenging those may be, particularly in regard to the deterioration that they have suffered over centuries of exposure to the elements, these inscriptions offer the first glimpses of the Inner Asian pastoralists' views of the world. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the vast bulk of our information about Inner Asia during the Early Middle Ages comes from outside sources, with Chinese sources being by far the most voluminous.⁶ The Old Turkic and Uyghur inscriptions, however important they may be, are primarily works of political propaganda and so must be used with as much caution as the sources written by other peoples—many of whom tended to regard the Inner Asians as “barbarians.” Finally, it is important to note that there remain many gaps in our knowledge of the history of Inner Asia during the Early Middle Ages. The paucity of sources, particularly in the western regions, makes it sometimes difficult to reconstruct events. Scholars have made very effective use of new forms of information, such as numismatics and archaeological findings, to attempt to fill these gaps,⁷ but their findings, however creative, must remain provisional.

Very little is known about the Türks prior to the mid sixth century, when they are described by Chinese sources as a subject people living within the nomad empire that had been created around 400 CE by a people known only by Chinese versions of their name: Rouran, Ruru, etc.⁸ The earliest information we have about the Türks suggests that they had begun to chafe under Rouran rule and were eager to improve their position; when this was thwarted by the Rouran ruler's refusal to consent to a marital connection, Bumīn (Chinese: Tumen),⁹ a Türk leader of the Ashina clan, started a rebellion in 552 that soon overthrew the Rouran. He took for himself the supreme title of *qaghan*, which had been employed by Rouran (and other) sovereigns, to indicate the establishment of a new political order on the Mongolian Plateau. Although Bumīn died—most likely in battle—soon after this, he had already created a strong basis for his revolt to continue by opening up diplomatic and trade relations with the Western Wei dynasty in North China in 545, cemented by a marriage alliance in 551.¹⁰ His sons, as well as his brother Ishtemi,

5 See Róna-Tas, “Development and Origin.”

6 Some of these sources are available in translation in various European languages: Liu, *Chinesischen Nachrichten* (in German, concerning the Türks); Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue* (in French, concerning the Western Türks); and Mackerras, *Uighur Empire* (in English, concerning the Uyghurs).

7 See, for example, Rezakhani, *Reorienting the Sasanians*, 157–84.

8 The Rouran are thought by many scholars to be the same people as the Avars of Europe. See Kollautz and Miyakawa, *Völkerwanderungszeitlichen Nomadenvölker*, as well as Macartney, “Greek Sources.”

9 The consonantal incongruence between Old Turkic Bumīn and Chinese Tumen has not been resolved. It should be noted here that there are frequent difficulties with Türk and Uyghur names. Türk and Uyghur rulers were often known by multiple names; I have tried to use the most well-known forms here. When the Turkic form is known, I have used that but also provided transliterations (mostly Chinese) that are used in the major sources. When the Turkic form is not securely known, I have used the Chinese transliteration without additional comment.

10 *Zhoushu*, 50: 908; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 159: 4926 and 164: 5069–70.

took up the great enterprise and soon had not only destroyed the Rouran polity but also extended Türk power to such an extent that their nascent empire surpassed in size any previous nomadic empire of Inner Asia.¹¹

The First Türk Empire, 552–630

Bumïn's revolt launched what has become known as the First Türk Empire, which, at its height, stretched from Manchuria in the east to the frontiers of the Sasanian and Byzantine empires in the west. Much of this was accomplished by Bumïn's son Muqan (or Mugan; Chinese: Mugan/Muhan; Sogdian: Mwx'n) in the east and his brother Ishtemi (Chinese: Shidianmi; Greek: Stembis) in the west. Although they could be considered joint rulers, Muqan (r. 553–572 CE)—the second of Bumïn's sons to succeed him—was supreme sovereign, or qaghan, while Ishtemi should be considered a type of viceroy. Given the size and nature of the First Türk Empire, however, it is not surprising that Ishtemi enjoyed a great deal of autonomy; eventually, in the 580s, the empire split into two competing polities, known as the Eastern and Western Türks. This division did not follow a neat pattern of Bumïn's descendants ruling the eastern part of the empire and Ishtemi's ruling the western.

Leadership in the empire was in fact a highly complex matter; virtually any adult male of the ruling Ashina family could claim the paramount position of qaghan. This family claimed supernatural support to legitimate its rule, both through myths of origin and regular assertion of divine support.¹² Transfers of power were often accompanied by violence as contenders fought for the throne. Brother struggled with brother, and cousin with cousin; intergenerational conflict, typically between uncles and nephews, was also known.¹³ To diminish such tendencies, Türk rulers often gave high titles—and corresponding powers within designated territories—to other royal men to prevent them from becoming rivals; some of these were even given the title of qaghan, although such "small qaghans," as the Chinese called them, were understood not to be the empire's supreme rulers but were major regional governors under the suzerainty of the supreme qaghan.¹⁴ Other Ashina elites held different—but also august—titles such as *yabghu*, *shad*, *chor*, and *tegin* (Chinese: *yehu*, *she*, *chuo*, and *teqin*).

Leadership of the empire was thus highly decentralized, with the imperial family regarding it as a corporate entity that was governed exclusively by males of the Ashina family but in which regional leaders (both Türk and non-Türk) enjoyed relatively high levels of autonomy.¹⁵ Such an arrangement ultimately created centrifugal forces within

11 On the history of the Rouran, see Kollautz and Miyakawa, *Völkerwanderungszeitlichen Nomadenvölker*, I: 107–37.

12 Drompp, "Strategies of Cohesion," 441–45.

13 On the frequent struggles that accompanied royal succession in Inner Asia, see Fletcher, "Turco-Mongolian," 238–42.

14 Drompp, "Supernumerary Sovereigns."

15 Note Di Cosmo, *China and Its Enemies*, 215–27, which discusses the earlier Han/Xiongnu model in which the decentralized Inner Asian polity of the Xiongnu is contrasted to the more centralized Chinese polity of the Han. This model can in many ways be applied to the polity of the Türks.

the empire and gradually led to its division and, later, its downfall. As for members of the royal family itself, their authority gave them power but also required that they exercise it for the benefit of their people—particularly the aristocrats whose collaboration was crucial for the empire's functioning. Nomad leaders of the Inner Asian steppe were expected to improve their subjects' lives, often through the acquisition of goods that could be either employed as prestige items or used to exchange for other forms of wealth. This transfer of wealth from elites to their followers was a normal part of the nomad world and played an important role in the history of the Türk and Uyghur empires. The eighth-century Old Turkic inscriptions point to the importance of prestige goods—particularly gold, silver, and silk from China as well as horses and furs from subjugated Inner Asian peoples—to the imperial enterprise.

The collaboration of Muqan and Ishtemi resulted in the largest nomadic empire that Inner Asia had seen thus far and that was exceeded in scale only by the Mongol empire of the thirteenth century. In the eastern part of the empire, Muqan Qaghan consolidated his rule in Mongolia and extended his power over a number of neighbouring peoples including the Khitans (Chinese: Qidan) to the east, the Turkic Kirghiz (Old Turkic: Qırqız; Chinese: Qigu, Jiankun, and later Xiajiasi) to the northwest, and the Tuyuhun to the south.¹⁶ His interactions with China—and indeed the rise of the Türks in general—were eased by the fact that China was at this time politically fragmented. The Northern Wei dynasty, which had ruled all of North China for more than a century, had disintegrated in 534, dividing into the Eastern Wei (534–550) and Western Wei (534–557) dynasties; these later changed their names to Northern Qi (550–577) and Northern Zhou (557–581) respectively. These rival states in North China regularly sought to strengthen ties with the Türks to their own political advantage, a situation that helped the Türks both politically and economically. In the west, Muqan's uncle Ishtemi allied with the Sasanian empire to destroy the Hephthalite kingdom based in Afghanistan by 563.¹⁷ From this alliance, the Türks gained a significant amount of territory, including land north of the Oxus river, which marked the new frontier between the Türks and Sasanians.

Türk relations with the Sasanians did not remain cordial for long. Although the historian al-Ṭabarī reported that the Sasanian ruler Xusrō I Anōšarvān (r. 531–579 CE) wed a woman of the Türk royal family, possibly a daughter of Ishtemi himself, this familial connection—if accurate—did not guarantee a smooth relationship, even though the Sasanian emperor's son and successor, Hormīzd IV (r. 579–590 CE), was said to be the product of this union.¹⁸ Türk connections with Byzantium yielded more positive results.

In both the east and the west, the Türks came into regular contact with Sogdians, an Iranian people from Transoxiana, with whom they formed important partnerships.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Zhoushu*, 50: 909–10; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 166: 5140, 5152–53.

¹⁷ On the war with the Hephthalites and the challenges of its dating, see Kurbanov, *Hephthalites*, 183–88.

¹⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 160 and 265.

¹⁹ On the location of Sogdiana (or Sughd/Soghd) in Transoxiana, centred around the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, see Bregel, *Historical Atlas*, 12–15.

The Sogdians were already known to the Türks when Bumīn began his revolt against Rouran rule; as traders they had established themselves in colonies from their homeland to China, and their people became important in both China and the Tarim Basin not only as traders but also as political and religious agents. In fact, the first Western Wei envoy to Bumīn in 545 was a Sogdian (Chinese: *Hu*) in Wei service,²⁰ and the chief Türk envoy to the Sasanians and the Byzantines was also a Sogdian.²¹ More importantly, the lands which the Türks seized from the Hephthalites included Sogdiana, so that most Sogdians now became subjects of the Türks. During the Early Middle Ages, Türk and Uyghur elites regularly employed and collaborated with Sogdians for a variety of purposes. Indeed, scholars have spoken of a Turco-Sogdian synthesis during this era.²² The Sogdians would prove valuable and influential collaborators with the Turkic peoples throughout the Early Middle Ages. While many different peoples, both nomadic and sedentary, collaborated with Türks and Uyghurs, the Sogdians stand out as the most significant of these and often played a role in the success of the Turkic peoples and their dominion over Inner Asia. The Turco-Sogdian synthesis has been described as promoting a “golden age” in Sogdiana.²³

In the western part of the empire, Ishtemi and his successors ruled over a large and diverse territory that could support both nomadic and sedentary populations; the latter, living primarily in and around the cities of Transoxiana and the Tarim Basin, provided the Türks with both local products and goods that were obtained as taxes from trade passing through the region. These included agricultural products as well as metals and textiles. Usually, the Türks permitted native rulers of these cities to remain in place so long as they acknowledged their subordination to the Türks and provided them with various forms of tribute, including soldiers for their armies. In some cases, however, rulers from among the Türks themselves governed.²⁴ The Sogdians promoted trade between the Türks and Sasanians, but at times the Persians developed a more antagonistic relationship with their erstwhile allies and spurned Türk overtures.²⁵ More successful were trade links with the Byzantines. The Türks employed a Sogdian named Maniakh in 568 to open communication with the Byzantine emperor Justin II (r. 565–578 CE); the emperor responded by sending his envoy, Zemarchus, to the Türks the following year.²⁶ There were more exchanges in the years that followed, but when the Byzantines gave refuge to the Avars, whom the Türks considered their subjects, relations soured, reaching a low

20 *Zhoushu*, 50: 908.

21 Menander Protector, *Historia*, 110–13.

22 Although there have been works on the Sogdians published since the middle of the twentieth century, a remarkable flourishing of Sogdian studies in the past two decades has led to the publication of some groundbreaking works. Most significant among these is Vaissière, *Marchands Sogdiens*, which is available in later editions, including an English translation. Other useful works include Vaissière and Trombert, *Les Sogdiens en Chine*, and Stark, *Alltürkenzeit*, particularly 209–314.

23 Rezakhani, *Reorienting the Sasanians*, 157–58.

24 Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 364–66.

25 Compareti, “History of Sogdiana,” 376.

26 Menander Protector, *Historia*, 110–27.

point when the Türks pressed into Byzantine territory as far as the Crimean Peninsula in 576.²⁷

Under the successors of Muqan (d. 572 CE) and Ishtemi (d. ca. 576 CE) the First Türk Empire continued to flourish, held together primarily by the agreement of men of the highest rank in the ruling Ashina house. Muqan was succeeded by his younger brother Tatpar (Chinese: Tabuo, Sogdian T'tp'r; r. 572–581 CE), the last of Bumīn's sons to hold supreme power. The political disunity of China was a significant factor in keeping the Türk empire strong; Chinese sources note how Tatpar was able to manipulate the emperors of Western Wei/Northern Zhou and Eastern Wei/Northern Qi to his advantage, enjoying lavish “gifts” from his southern neighbours in exchange for peace at the frontier.²⁸ Although there are only two known native sources from the First Türk Empire, in the form of two rather badly damaged stone inscriptions, these reveal some very important things. Of particular note is the fact that both inscriptions were written in the Sogdian language. The larger of the two, known as the Bugut inscription, also contains a much shorter text in Brāhmī script; its language is uncertain due to the severe erosion that it has experienced. This inscription, erected in central Mongolia, was written to celebrate the accomplishments of Muqan and Tatpar, and so must date to the period soon after the latter's death. Reading it has challenged experts in the Sogdian language; the two existing translations differ broadly from one another.²⁹ The second inscription, located in modern Xinjiang province in China, has been only partially translated thus far.³⁰ Another Brāhmī text, the Khüis Tolgoi inscription, which may date to this same general period, has proven a challenge to scholars in terms of both its language and meaning.³¹

One translation of the Bugut inscription saw the Sogdian text providing evidence of Buddhism among the Türks, but this has been disputed by the second team of translators. That being said, Chinese sources do make note of the patronage of Buddhism by some Türk elites, and even claim (most likely incorrectly) the conversion of the qaghans Muqan and Tatpar to Buddhism. In the western reaches of the empire, the Türks would have encountered a significant Buddhist presence in the Tarim Basin and Transoxiana, and again there is evidence of Türk elite patronage. Unfortunately, the sources that remain are few and inconclusive.³² Ultimately, it does not seem that the religion made significant inroads in the general Türk population, nor does it seem that royal patronage remained constant throughout the years of the First Türk Empire.

27 Menander Protector, *Historia*, 170–79.

28 *Zhoushu*, 50: 911.

29 Compare the translation in Klyaštorny and Livšic, “Sogdian Inscription,” to that by Yoshida Yutaka and Moriyasu Takao in Moriyasu and Ochir, *Mongorokoku genson iseki*, 122–25.

30 Ôsawa, “Aspect of the Relationship.”

31 See Vovin, “Khüis Tolgoi Inscription.”

32 Porció, “Turkic Peoples,” 18–23. See also Gabain, “Buddhistische Türkenmission.” The Khüis Tolgoi inscription may change our understanding of Buddhism in Inner Asia at this time; see Vovin, “Khüis Tolgoi Inscription.”

The bonds that kept the empire united eventually weakened, thanks not only to the empire's vast size but also to the Inner Asian tradition of succession in which any adult male of the ruling family was eligible to become supreme qaghan. Although it is difficult to point to a precise date when it occurred, the empire had split into two states, known as the Eastern Türk Empire and the Western Türk Empire, by 583.³³ These polities were at times political rivals with one another. Tatpar's intention was that his son Anluo (Sogdian: Wmn'?) should succeed him, but Muqan's son Daluobian put himself forward as a candidate as well. In the end, a third grandson of Bumīn was chosen from a different lineage; this was İshbara (Chinese: Shabolue), son of Bumīn's son Qara (Chinese: Keluo) who had ruled only briefly after Bumīn's death. All three of these men, grandsons of Bumīn and therefore cousins, had valid claims to the throne. According to Chinese sources it was the "ministers" of the empire—most likely a group of aristocrats—who made the final decision.³⁴

The disappointed cousins Anluo and Daluobian did not simply fade away when İshbara Qaghan (r. 581–587 CE) was elevated to the supreme position; Anluo was given the title of "second qaghan" (Chinese: *di'er kehan*) and assigned a region of the empire to govern; Daluobian was given the title Apa (Chinese: Abo) Qaghan.³⁵ In the west, Ishtemi was succeeded by his son Tardu (Chinese: Datou; Greek: Tardou; r. 576–603 CE); it was during his reign that the empire's division into two competing halves can be considered complete.³⁶ At the same time he had to contend with rivals within his own territory. Apa Qaghan had sought refuge with the Western Türks in 583 and enjoyed influence until his capture by the Eastern Türk ruler Chuluohou Qaghan (r. 587–588 CE) in 587. Apa's power had been a threat to Tardu, who moved his own power base further east, where he became increasingly involved in the affairs of the Eastern Türks.³⁷ Even after Apa's defeat Tardu remained in the east, eventually disappearing after fleeing to the Tuyuhun kingdom around 603. The next rulers of the Western Türks are thought to have been from Apa's family rather than the lineage of Ishtemi and Tardu, but the throne eventually returned to Ishtemi's line with the accession of Shegui Qaghan (r. 611–618 CE), who was Tardu's grandson.³⁸ After that, descendants of Ishtemi and Tardu remained in control of the Western Türks.

While the division of the empire was a significant matter, the security of Türk dominance in Inner Asia was threatened less by political bifurcation than by the reunification of China under aggressive dynasties that were eager to weaken Türk power and expand their own: the Sui (581–618 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE). Both emerged from the "mixed aristocracy" that had begun to dominate politics in North China by the fifth century.

33 See Wang, "Apa Qaghan," on the division of the empire.

34 *Zhoushu*, 50: 1865; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 175: 5449–50.

35 *Zhoushu*, 50: 1865; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 175: 5450. For further discussion of these events, see Drompp, "Supernumerary Sovereigns," 95–99.

36 Wang, "Apa Qaghan."

37 Wang, "Apa Qaghan," 148.

38 See Ôsawa, "Aspect of the Relationship," 477–91.

This aristocratic group, which included the founders of both dynasties, had cultural links, and often familial ties as well, to the steppe. They thus had a good understanding of Inner Asian nomadic peoples and their traditions.

The Sui state, which succeeded in bringing all of China under the rule of a single emperor in 589 after centuries of political fragmentation, was determined to diminish the influence that the Türks had enjoyed in North China under their predecessors. İshbara Qaghan had initially been hostile to the new dynasty, attacking in both 581 and 582; in this he was influenced by his wife, a Northern Zhou princess, who encouraged him to take an antagonistic approach to the new empire to the south. In response, the Sui sought to undermine the Türks by making separate connections with various elites of the royal Ashina clan. As a result, some important Türk leaders, including Apa Qaghan, turned against İshbara, whose position was thus weakened. After he was defeated by a Sui army, İshbara was brought to heel and became a Sui client in 584, formally offering his submission in 585; the Sui strategy of *divide et impera*—an approach that has a long history in China's dealings with nomads—had been successful. İshbara moved southward into Sui territory; he died two years later, when his camp caught fire while he was on a hunting expedition in North China.³⁹ After the brief reign of his successor Chuluohou Qaghan, Dulan Qaghan (r. 588–599 CE) sought to improve the Türks' situation, even to the point of renouncing his submission to the Sui in 593. The Sui then shifted support to a rival of Dulan's who was elevated as Qimin Qaghan (r. 599–608 CE). It was under Qimin that Türk dependence on the Sui dynasty reached its height; he and many of his followers were resettled south of the great bend of the Yellow River, and the Chinese government even built walled towns to house them. In 601, the Sui, allied with Qimin, launched an attack on the Western Türks, who were defeated. Many tribes that had been subordinates of the Western Türks now gave their allegiance to Qimin Qaghan.⁴⁰ This was one factor contributing to the decline of Tardu described above.⁴¹

The Sui emperors were not content simply to weaken the power of the Türks; they also expanded their influence in other directions. Some of their military campaigns were successful, such as that which temporarily undercut the Tuyuhun state centred around Qinghai; others caused significant problems, particularly the campaigns against the Korean state of Koguryō, in which large numbers of Sui troops perished and the Sui goal of dominating Koguryō was never achieved. The dynasty's failed efforts in Korea, along with other problems, led to its precipitous demise in 618.⁴² This allowed the Türks a chance to recover, which they were able to do so quickly that they managed to take an important role in the power struggle that ensued in North China. As the Sui weakened, Qimin Qaghan's son Shibi Qaghan (r. 608–619 CE) worked to re-establish his power, forcing the submission of various peoples and polities including the Khitans, Tuyuhun,

³⁹ *Suishu*, 84: 1865–70.

⁴⁰ *Suishu*, 84: 1871–75.

⁴¹ Pan, "Early Chinese Settlement," 57–61. See also Vaissière, "Away from the Ötükan," 453–55, where Qimin is referred to by an alternate name: Duli (Old Turkic *Tuldikh?*).

⁴² See the account of the Sui dynasty in Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 48–149.

and the city of Gaochang (Old Turkic *Qocho*) to the north of the Tarim Basin. According to Chinese sources, no leader of the northern peoples had ever reached such a level of strength.⁴³ Shibi then turned against the Sui court, at least partially in response to a Chinese plot against one of his Sogdian officials, by launching an attack in 615 that nearly led to the Sui emperor's capture.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he later took in the Sui empress and her retinue, including the emperor's grandson, when the Sui government collapsed.⁴⁵

Turning his attention to North China, Shibi offered support to a number of men contending for the throne, even to the point of granting them titles—a reversal of the “typical” relationship in which Chinese rulers bestowed titles on nomad rulers as a show of China's recognition of their legitimacy. In the end it was Li Yuan (r. 618–626 CE), the duke of Tang, who defeated his enemies and became the new emperor. In this he had enjoyed the support of the Türks; Shibi provided him with troops and horses, arranged through one of Shibi's Sogdian officials. This had been crucial to his success; the numbers of troops and horses provided by the Türks were not great but had signalled not only Türk support for Li Yuan but also the fact that the Türks would not work against him. In his communications with the Türk ruler Li Yuan had employed submissive language; although some of his followers lamented this, his justification was that the use of such language was a small price to pay if it would result in his gaining the throne.⁴⁶ Li Yuan's gamble paid off; furthermore, his actions did not result in the new Tang dynasty becoming a client state of the Türks as the Western Wei/Northern Zhou and Eastern Wei/Northern Qi had in some ways been. Indeed, it was not long before the relationship between the Tang and Türk states became one of overt hostility. Shibi's successor Chuluo Qaghan (r. 619–620 CE) continued to maintain the rump Sui court, which was a threat to Tang stability and legitimacy.⁴⁷

Although Tang relations with the Türks began on a positive note, those relations worsened under the reign of the second Tang emperor, Li Shimin, commonly known as Tang Taizong (r. 626–649 CE). A usurper, his first years on the throne were somewhat tenuous, and he did not provoke the Türks under their ruler Ellig (Chinese: Xieli) Qaghan (r. 620–630 CE). Just a few weeks after Taizong seized the throne, Ellig Qaghan and the new emperor agreed to a peace accord after a military showdown near the Tang capital city of Chang'an; Taizong maintained the peace with extensive gifts for the Türks.⁴⁸ Despite the appearance of strength in the Türk empire, however, significant internal threats soon arose. Subordinate peoples rebelled against Ellig in 627. As the Türk polity weakened, Taizong seized the opportunity to destroy it. His officials had informed him of multiple problems plaguing the Türks, including a series of harsh winters which had

⁴³ *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5153.

⁴⁴ *Suishu*, 67: 1582; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 182: 5697–700.

⁴⁵ *Suishu*, 84: 1876.

⁴⁶ See Drompp, “Chinese *Qaghans*.”

⁴⁷ *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5154.

⁴⁸ *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5157–58; *Xin Tangshu*, 93: 3814; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 191: 6019–20; Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 220–21.

caused the die-off of large numbers of herd animals—a periodic and sometimes devastating occurrence on the steppe. Their intelligence painted a picture of a ruler alienated from his people due in large part to his reliance on Sogdian advisers.⁴⁹ While the theme of the pernicious influence of the Sogdians as “puppet-masters” of the “simple” Turks makes it necessary to consider the report of Taizong’s officials with some caution, there is no reason to doubt its basic premise.

Taizong allied with a disaffected “little qaghan” named Tuli, Ellig Qaghan’s nephew, to bring down not only Ellig’s rule but also the entire Eastern Türk Empire in 630. The rump Sui court was captured and so disappeared as a threat to the new dynasty; shortly thereafter, Ellig Qaghan was seized and brought to the Tang capital of Chang’an, where he died in 634.⁵⁰ Large numbers of Türk elites were brought into China, and a major debate at the Tang court ensued as to what was to be done with them. Initially it was decided to settle them deep within the Tang realm, but after some time it was decided to move them closer to the frontier.⁵¹ Taizong celebrated his triumph by taking the title “Heavenly Qaghan” (Chinese: *Tian Kehan*),⁵² leaving no doubt as to his intent to rule over both sedentary and nomadic peoples in his expanding empire.

Türk Submission to China, 630–682 CE

During the period of Türk submission, there were several important historical trends to note. One is that the Turks in China never lost their distinctiveness as a community, holding onto their language, identity, and historical memory. While they participated in Tang campaigns (indeed, many Türk generals, often from the Ashina clan, served in the Tang military) and political rituals, they still remembered their past glory. Another important historical trend involved the efforts of other nomadic peoples in Mongolia to take the place of the defeated Turks. Different groups engaged in struggles for power, which resulted in the region being dominated primarily by the Uyghurs (also called Tiele in Chinese sources at this time) for much of the half century. Although records are few, it seems clear that the Uyghurs acted with the support of the Tang government into which their realm was “officially” incorporated.⁵³

The Western Turks had come under Tang control by 660, just a few decades after their eastern cousins, thanks to problems within the realm and far-flung Tang campaigns to the west. Shigui Qaghan’s younger brother Ton Yabghu (Chinese: Tong Yehu) Qaghan (r. 618–630 CE) maintained a pro-Byzantine policy that saw him ally with Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641 CE) against the Sasanians in 626 or 627.⁵⁴ To the Tang Buddhist

⁴⁹ *Jiu Tangshu*, 68: 2507 and 194a: 5158–59; *Xin Tangshu*, 215a: 6032–34.

⁵⁰ *Xin Tangshu*, 215a: 6034–36; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 192: 6049–50, 193: 6070–74, 194: 6105.

⁵¹ Pan, “Early Chinese Settlement,” 61–71.

⁵² See Pan, “Marriage Alliances,” 179–83; Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 119–22; and Park, “Barbarians to the Middle Kingdom.”

⁵³ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 188–89.

⁵⁴ See Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 403–8 as well as Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue*, 252–53.

pilgrim Xuanzang, who passed through his empire in 630, it appeared that Ton Yabghu ruled over a realm of great power and wealth.⁵⁵ But soon after the Chinese monk's visit, Ton Yabghu suffered a rebellion of subject peoples and then was murdered by his own uncle.⁵⁶ This led to the empire's decline and gave the Tang dynasty an opportunity in the western regions that Taizong quickly worked to exploit. After Taizong's death, his son and successor Gaozong (r. 649–683 CE) continued his policies and inflicted serious defeats on the Western Türks, which brought them under his control.⁵⁷

With the collapse of the two Türk realms, Tang power was extended into the Tarim Basin and beyond, including a loose suzerainty over Sogdiana.⁵⁸ Under this arrangement, Sogdian rulers enjoyed a high level of autonomy.⁵⁹ The Turkic peoples in the western regions did not remain rudderless and eventually came under the dominion of the Turkic Türgesh (Chinese: Tujishi) people around 699. United by their leader Wuzhile (as he is called in Chinese sources), the Türgesh became major contenders for political dominance in western Inner Asia. They not only challenged Tang influence in the regions north and west of the Tarim Basin but also were a force, along with local Sogdian rulers, working against the spread of Umayyad power into Transoxiana. As part of its conquest of Persia, the Umayyad caliphate had extended its control northward towards the Oxus river, seizing the cities of Merv in 650 and Balkh in 652. But there the caliphate became mired in a situation that stalled its expansion. For some fifty years, Umayyad troops raided into Transoxiana but faced strong resistance from native rulers, particularly the Sogdians; the Umayyads thus could not establish a foothold in the region.⁶⁰ Further west, the Turkic Khazars emerged as a power in the region of the lower Volga river and the area north of the Caucasus, where they also served as a barrier to Umayyad expansion.⁶¹

The era of the rise of the Tang dynasty was also the period during which Tibet emerged as a powerful empire. The Sui dynasty's temporary conquest of the Tuyuhun state marked the beginning of Tibet's imperial interactions with the outside world, as the Tibetans sent envoys to the Chinese court in 608 and 609. After some years of political consolidation under the ruler Sron btsan sgampo (r. 618–649 CE), the Tibetan empire began to flex its muscles through expansion in several directions; this included the absorption of the revitalized Tuyuhun kingdom in 663.⁶² In 670, the Tibetans began campaigns to seize parts of the Tarim Basin from the Tang dynasty; the two powers struggled over this region for a long time, with Tibetan control in the Tarim being extensive from 670 to 692.⁶³

55 See Xuanzang, *Da Tang xiyu ji*, 42–45.

56 *Jiu Tangshu*, 194b: 5181–82; *Xin Tangshu*, 215b: 6056–57.

57 Pan, "Marriage Alliances," 195–97.

58 Compareti, "History of Sogdiana," 376–77.

59 Marshak, "Turks and Sogdians," 386.

60 Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 225–26, 236–37; Bregel, *Historical Atlas*, 16–17.

61 The development of the Khazars is a complex issue; see *Golden Turkic Peoples*, 233–39. Note that the reference to the collapse of the Western Türks in the eighth century (236) is a misprint for the seventh century.

62 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 17–22.

63 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 34–53, 201.

The Second Türk Empire, 682–742 CE

The period of Tang domination over the Türks ended in 682 with the successful revolt of Qutluğ (Chinese: Guduoluo) Elterish Qaghan (r. 682–691 CE) after several failed efforts by other Türk elites to throw off Chinese rule. Elterish, a descendant of Ellig Qaghan, was able to unite enough of the Türks to return to the steppe, end the power of the Uyghurs there, and create a new polity: the Second Türk Empire (682–742 CE).⁶⁴ It was this empire that left behind inscriptions in Old Turkic language in the so-called runiform script derived ultimately from Aramaic.⁶⁵ Those inscriptions, the first known sources in a script created specifically for the expression of a language of Inner Asian nomadic peoples, reveal how traumatic the period of the Türks' subordination to Tang rule was. Warning against trusting the "wily and deceitful" Chinese who lure other peoples with their "sweet words and soft materials," the inscriptions point to the era of Tang domination as one of humiliation and ruin, in which Türk elites entered into a condition of servitude to the Chinese.⁶⁶ Although the Second Türk Empire ultimately came to a relatively peaceful *modus vivendi* with the Tang state, this was only after years of contention and regular conflict.

Elterish spent the remainder of his life rebuilding Türk power with the aid of his relatives and advisers. Most important of these was Tonyuquq (Chinese: Dunyugu), who ultimately served not only Elterish but also the succeeding two qaghans. When Elterish died, his sons were still relatively young; although some Chinese records claim that Elterish's brother Qapghan (called *Mochuo* in Chinese sources, possibly a transliteration of Old Turkic *Beg Chor*) Qaghan (r. 691–716 CE) took the throne in an act of usurpation,⁶⁷ the Old Turkic inscriptions tell another story, insisting that his rule was in accordance with the customary regulations of the empire.⁶⁸ Qapghan's long rule saw the apogee of the Second Türk Empire's power; he continued his brother's work by subduing other Turkic peoples such as the Basmils, Bayırqu, and Qarluqs (Chinese: Baximi, Bayegu, and Geluolu). He was successful in his negotiations with Empress Wu and her "Zhou" dynasty (690–705 CE) in China.⁶⁹ With a keen understanding of the difficulties of her position—she was not only a usurper but also the only woman in China's history to take the title of "emperor" (*huangdi*) and rule in her own right—he intervened in Tang relations with the Khitans of Manchuria to his advantage, first offering to help the Tang put down a Khitan rebellion and then absorbing them into his empire after obtaining concessions from the empress.⁷⁰ Despite these problems with an aggressive Eastern Türk empire, Empress Wu

⁶⁴ *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5166–67; *Xin Tangshu*, 215a: 6042–44.

⁶⁵ Róna-Tas, "Development and Origin."

⁶⁶ Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 261–65.

⁶⁷ *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5168; *Xin Tangshu*, 215a: 6045.

⁶⁸ Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 266.

⁶⁹ This dynasty is not considered legitimate by Chinese historians; the empress' reign is counted as part of the Tang dynasty.

⁷⁰ Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 313–18. Some scholars refer to Empress Wu as "Emperor Wu" because of the uniqueness of her position. Chinese *huangdi*, "emperor," is without any marker of gender, and the term "empress" is typically used in English as a designation for the emperor's chief

succeeded in restoring Tang control over the Tarim Basin and environs, much of which had come to be controlled by Tibet. Her campaign in 692 proved successful.⁷¹ As Tang power grew in the Tarim, Qapghan Qaghan sought to assert his control over the Turkic peoples to the west in the region of Jungaria and the Tianshan Mountains. But his efforts were opposed by the Türgesh, who had newly risen to power.⁷²

The new Türgesh polity faced numerous foes at this time. In addition to the Eastern Türks under Qapghan who was working to subdue them, there were also the Tang (or “Zhou”) Dynasty, now in control of the Tarim Basin, and the Umayyads south of the Oxus. It was at just this juncture that a new Umayyad governor of Khurasan, Qutayba ibn Muslim, began renewed efforts to extend Umayyad power into Transoxiana. His decade-long war against Transoxiana, which he began upon his appointment to the governorship in 705, has been described as “the toughest, bloodiest and probably the most destructive of all the campaigns of the great Arab conquests.”⁷³ At the heart of his campaigns were the cities of Sogdiana; he faced significant opposition from the Sogdians and their Türgesh allies but gradually extended his control over Bukhara in 709. Qutayba continued his advance, taking the great city of Samarkand in 712. In what was apparently an unusual move, Qutayba oversaw the pillaging and destruction of Zoroastrian places of worship along with the construction of a mosque; he left troops there to guard the city after his departure.⁷⁴ This situation was complicated by the appearance of the Eastern Türks. Drawn westward by an opportunity to become involved in an internecine conflict among the Türgesh, Qapghan Qaghan sent an army into the Tianshan region and extended his control over them. The Türgesh thus briefly were incorporated into his empire.⁷⁵ The Türks then pushed further west into Sogdiana and became involved in the wars with Qutayba in 712–714. This effort proved too much for the Türks; they were defeated by Qutayba’s forces and soon retreated eastward. The Türgesh reasserted their independence, and Qutayba continued his efforts to subdue Transoxiana. Having taken Chach (Tashkent) in 713, he campaigned for two more years—even invading Ferghana in alliance with Tibet—before events in the caliphate led to his revolt and death.⁷⁶

Qutayba’s death brought serious reversals for the Umayyads in Transoxiana. There were major revolts by the Sogdians, often with the assistance of the Türgesh, who were at this time allied with the Tibetans. The Umayyads suffered many defeats, and their position deteriorated, despite occasional victories such as their 722 conquest of Penjikent, to

wife, making it problematic for this woman sovereign. I have maintained the more common term “empress” for her as readers unfamiliar with the historical details might overlook the fact that she was China’s only female *huangdi* and believe “Emperor Wu” to be male.

71 Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 205: 6486–87.

72 *Jiu Tangshu*, 194b: 5190–91; *Xin Tangshu*, 215b: 6066–67.

73 Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 256.

74 Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 255–70; Bregel, *Historical Atlas*, 18–19.

75 *Jiu Tangshu*, 194b: 5190–91; *Xin Tangshu*, 215b: 6066–67.

76 Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 270–76; Bregel, *Historical Atlas*, 18–19. On the alliance with Tibet, see Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 81–83.

the point at which virtually all of Qutayba's gains had been lost.⁷⁷ The Türgesh were now in a powerful position; they maintained their alliance with Tibet, which was marked by the marriage of a Tibetan princess to the Türgesh qaghan in 734.⁷⁸ Although some efforts were made to establish peace between the Tang, Türgesh, and Tibetan empires, these did not lead to any lasting agreements, and conflict frequently erupted as these polities sought greater power in Inner Asia.⁷⁹

New Umayyad efforts in Transoxiana began with the death of the Sogdian king of Samarkand in 737; this time, Umayyad troops, who had gained the support of some regional elites, inflicted a severe defeat on the Türgesh, who had been weakened by the murder of their ruler, known as Sulu in Chinese sources and in Arabic as Abū Muzāḥim.⁸⁰ The end result was the collapse of the Türgesh state in 739 and the continued expansion of Umayyad control. Although the Umayyads were overthrown by a revolt that replaced them with the 'Abbāsīd caliphate in 749/750, the armies of Islam continued to dominate Transoxiana, crowning their achievements with a victory over Tang forces at the Battle of Talas in the summer of 751. This battle helped cement 'Abbāsīd control over the region.⁸¹

The defeat by Umayyad forces was a turning point for Qapghan Qaghan, whose reign had been largely a long list of military and diplomatic triumphs. Some subordinate peoples turned against him; although he enjoyed a victory over the rebellious Bayırqu in 716, he was soon after that ambushed by a group of Bayırqu, who killed him and sent his head to the Chinese capital.⁸² His death brought an end to Eastern Türk engagement in the parts of western Inner Asia that had once been the realm of the Western Türks, particularly the Tarim Basin and Jungaria. These regions were thus left to the Türgesh, who seized this opportunity—although their empire would not last much longer.

Qapghan apparently had intended to be succeeded by his own son, but his plans were foiled. Two sons of Elterish, now adults with a great deal of military experience between them, engineered a coup that led to the murder of most of Qapghan's family and supporters. Elterish's eldest son was then enthroned as Bilge (Chinese: Pijia) Qaghan (r. 716–734 CE); he was supported for many years by his younger brother, Kül Tegin (Chinese: Jue Teqin).⁸³ It was in memory of these two men that the grandest of the Old Turkic inscriptions were created. Epitaphs for Elterish and Qapghan have not been found, and indeed may never have been created. But we are quite fortunate to have the Bilge Qaghan and Kül Tegin inscriptions, which the empire erected not only to commemorate them personally but also as political propaganda to glorify (and thereby justify) their policies and the existence of the Second Türk Empire, as well as the personally produced

77 Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 276–89; Bregel, *Historical Atlas*, 18–19; Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 93–96.

78 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 102–9.

79 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 106–15.

80 Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 289–90. On the qaghan's names, see Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 85.

81 Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, 289–95; Bregel, *Historical Atlas*, 18–19.

82 *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5173; *Xin Tangshu*, 215a: 6048–49. See also Pan, "Marriage Alliances," 272–74.

83 *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5173; *Xin Tangshu*, 215a: 6049 and 215b: 6051.

inscription of the minister Tonyuquq, who had survived the coup.⁸⁴ These sources tell us a great deal about Türk history, culture, and political thought.

One thing that is immediately clear from the inscriptions is that Bilge Qaghan spent many years on the throne fighting to maintain his power; he carried out successful campaigns—often against peoples who had been previously subordinate to his uncle Qapghan—that brought the Qarluqs, Khitans, and other groups under his control; he also fought with China. In these campaigns he was aided by his brother Kül Tegin until the latter's death in 731.⁸⁵ Eventually Bilge reached an accommodation with the Tang dynasty so that wars with his southern neighbour ceased and substantial trade resumed.⁸⁶ Despite concerns about the “wily and deceitful” Chinese, Bilge was able to transform the situation; indeed, the Chinese emperor sent artisans to help build the funeral complexes of Kül Tegin and Bilge Qaghan.⁸⁷ The great stelae that commemorate the two men follow Chinese models and contain Chinese inscriptions as well as those in Old Turkic; even today the site is littered with Chinese-style roof tiles that once protected the complexes from the elements. These royal monuments are in contrast to the inscription created by Tonyuquq, which does not follow the morphological plan of Chinese stelae. Despite the employment of Chinese models and inscriptions, it is clear from the Old Turkic texts that the “nativist” rulers of the Second Türk Empire vigorously promoted the autochthonous religion of the Türks rather than any foreign beliefs from China or the west.⁸⁸

Bilge's friendly relations with the Tang court led him to alert the Chinese to a Tibetan proposal—which he rejected—that he join them in attacking China.⁸⁹ Furthermore, he sent representatives to take part in the grandiose *feng* and *shan* ritual to celebrate the power of his contemporary, the Tang Emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–756 CE) in 725.⁹⁰ Trade became an important part of this relationship, with Türk horses being traded for Chinese products, particularly silk.⁹¹ Envoys who travelled between the two realms included Sogdians in Bilge's retinue.⁹² But Bilge's cachet with the Chinese court was never enough to win him the coveted prize of a marriage alliance with the Tang royal house.⁹³

While Bilge's rule is generally seen as successful, he, too, was murdered—poisoned by one of his own officials. After his death, the realm quickly unravelled. During the

84 The inscriptions of Bilge Qaghan, Kül Tegin, and Tonyuquq are all translated in Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 261–90.

85 Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 267–71. Most of these campaigns, descriptions of which make up the bulk of the inscriptions, are ignored in Chinese sources, revealing the very real limitations of those sources—and the challenges of reliance upon them—for the study of Inner Asian history.

86 Pan, “Marriage Alliances,” 276–78.

87 This is made clear in the inscriptions themselves; see Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 272 and 281.

88 See Roux, “Religion des Turcs,” on the religion of the Türks. Efforts to find significant Zoroastrian practices among the Türks remain controversial and thus far unconvincing.

89 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 102.

90 Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 144–48.

91 Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 268–69.

92 *Cefu yuangui*, 975: 11450a, 11453a and 971: 11407b, 11409a.

93 Pan, “Marriage Alliances,” 276–78.

decade after his assassination, four different qaghans ruled over the Türks.⁹⁴ Trade with China continued, but the court found itself under increasing pressure. Subordinate peoples, who had already proved restive, rebelled again, and this time a coalition of three Turkic peoples, the Uyghurs, Qarluqs, and Basmils, succeeded in overthrowing the Türk state. Many prominent Türks, including people of Sogdian heritage, fled to China to seek asylum while other groups fought on the steppe for dominance.⁹⁵ Although the Basmils claimed supreme power for their ruler, in the end it was the Uyghurs, who had already shown their ambition in the 630–682 “interregnum,” who soon overthrew them and established a stable polity that would rule over the eastern steppe for nearly a century, from 744 to 840. Although details are few, the Uyghurs quickly established a realm stretching from Manchuria to the Altai Mountains.⁹⁶ The Qarluqs moved westward and gradually established themselves as masters of a new state in the old territories of the Türgesh.⁹⁷

North of the Caucasus, the Khazars continued to maintain and expand their state, which controlled important trade routes. Their political strategy included intermarriage with Byzantine royalty; Justinian II (r. 685–695 and 705–711 CE) married the sister of the Khazar ruler during his time of exile, and Leo IV (r. 775–780 CE) was known by the sobriquet “the Khazar” because his mother was the daughter of a Khazar ruler. This did not mean that the two powers always enjoyed amicable relations, but it does reveal their understanding of regional political realities and the Umayyad threat to the south. Khazar hostilities with the Umayyad caliphate continued intermittently, leading to a Khazar defeat in 737; this, however, was a short-lived victory for the armies of Islam, and the Khazars quickly re-established their autonomy. When the Umayyads were overthrown soon after this, their successors the ‘Abbāsids eventually proved willing to make peace with the Khazars, and conflict between the two powers had largely stopped by the end of the eighth century.⁹⁸

The Khazars continued to play an important role in regional commerce, including trade in furs, domestic animals, and slaves. While most of their people seem to have continued the practice of pastoral nomadism, the Khazars did build cities and fortresses within their territory.⁹⁹ They are also known for the conversion of their ruling elite to Judaism, but this may

⁹⁴ *Jiu Tangshu*, 194a: 5177–78; *Xin Tangshu*, 215b: 6054–55. The sources are somewhat confused, and rulers’ identities are not always clear.

⁹⁵ Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 215: 6855; Pulleyblank, “Sogdian Colony,” 339–41.

⁹⁶ *Xin Tangshu*, 217a: 6114–15; see also Kamalov, “Moghon Shine.”

⁹⁷ See Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 126n113, for details concerning the Qarluq migration. This event is mentioned in two Uyghur inscriptions; see Ramstedt, “Uigurische Runeninschriften,” 16, and Moriyasu and Ochir, *Mongorokoku genson iseki*, 183, for one inscription, and Klyashtorny, “Terkhin Inscription,” 345, for the other.

⁹⁸ See Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 220–27, and Golden, *Turkic Peoples*, 236–39. Whittow notes (223) that “in many Arab and Byzantine sources the terms ‘Khazar’ and ‘Turk’ are used interchangeably,” and further points out that the word “Turk” was sometimes used by the Byzantines to refer to the Hungarians as well (229). See also the comments in Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 403–4.

⁹⁹ Golden, *Turkic Peoples*, 240–41; Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 228–29.

not have had a significant impact on the bulk of the population.¹⁰⁰ The ninth century saw a gradual decline of the Khazars as new powers rose around them, particularly the Turkic Pechenegs and the Rus'. It was a Rus' prince, Svyatoslav, who administered the death-blow to the Khazar state in 965.¹⁰¹

The Uyghur Empire, 744–840 CE

The Uyghurs spoke the same language as the Türks. While they saw themselves as a distinct group with their own identity, they also embraced many practices of the Türks. They were led by a royal family with the name Yaghlaqar (Chinese: Yaoluoge); as with the Türks, the high-ranking leaders of this family worked together to set the Uyghur realm on a solid basis. The empire they created proved to be quite powerful, although it was never as large as the First Türk Empire at its height. Like the Türks, the Uyghurs ruled over a confederation of subject peoples, including Sogdian and Chinese communities. Throughout much of the history of their empire, the Uyghurs enjoyed a unique position on the steppe that was the result of unforeseen circumstances taking place in China.

At about the same time that the Uyghurs were establishing their dominance on the eastern steppe, the Tang empire was enjoying successes in the west, particularly thanks to the victories of General Gao Xianzhi, a man of Korean ancestry, over the armies of Tibet. With Tibet reeling from numerous defeats, by 750 the Tang dynasty had reached “the acme of Chinese military and political power” in Inner Asia, controlling the Tarim Basin, Jungaria, and the Pamirs.¹⁰² Having reached this peak, Tang power was stopped at the aforementioned Battle of Talas in 751 in which the previously invincible General Gao was defeated after his Qarluq allies switched sides to fight with the Arabs.¹⁰³

The defeat at Talas was not a major loss for the Tang, but it was a harbinger of much worse to come. In just a few years, the Tang dynasty was nearly destroyed by a massive military rebellion. Led by An Lushan, a man of Türk and Sogdian parentage, this rebellion grew out of military realities in the middle Tang era, when the dynasty found itself virtually surrounded by powerful states—not only the new empire of the Uyghurs, but also the still-powerful Tibetan empire and the state of Nanzhao in the southwest. In addition, there were other peoples such as the Khitans in south Manchuria who threatened Tang security. In response to this situation, the Tang state had created large standing armies at the frontier and placed them under the control of generals of foreign heritage, believing them more capable of defending China against its enemies. An Lushan spent

100 The date of the conversion to Judaism is a matter of some contention; some place it as early as the late eighth century (or first years of the ninth), while a case recently has been made for 861. For the traditional (earlier) date, and the question of Judaism's impact, see Golden, *Turkic Peoples*, 241–42, and Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 227–28. For the later date, see Zuckerman, “Khazars' Conversion.”

101 Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 228–43; Golden, *Turkic Peoples*, 243–44.

102 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 130–37.

103 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 138–40.

years defending the Tang but ultimately turned against the court when he felt that his position was in jeopardy.¹⁰⁴

The rebellion, which began in 755, was a watershed in East Asian history. In China, Emperor Xuanzong, whose reign up to this point is often regarded as a high point of Tang prestige and cultural brilliance, fled from the capital and relinquished the throne to his son, known as Suzong (r. 756–762 CE). The new emperor put out a call for assistance, and this was answered by the Uyghur ruler Bayan Chor (Chinese: Moyan Chuo; r. 747–759 CE) who sent troops to China to help bolster the dynasty in 757. After the qaghan's death, his successor Bögü (Chinese: Mouyu) Qaghan (r. 759–779 CE) continued to aid the Tang. Uyghur forces were crucial to the defeat of the rebels.¹⁰⁵ While this alone would reveal the historical significance of Uyghur power, the rebellion created a special relationship between the Tang and Uyghur courts that benefited the latter tremendously and shaped their rule in Inner Asia so that it followed a very different path from that of the Türks. This relationship not only provided the Uyghur rulers with prestige, but also gave them access to great wealth which they used to develop a new type of empire in Inner Asia. The rebellion also provided opportunities for Tibet, which first directed its aggression into China and then turned to the Tarim Basin and other regions to restore some of the power and influence that it had previously lost there.

The Tang dynasty survived An Lushan's rebellion but never regained the power and wealth that it had previously enjoyed. Instead, it was politically diminished, with various regional leaders, particularly in the northeast, enjoying a great deal of autonomy vis-à-vis the central government.¹⁰⁶ This was a serious development that cut the Tang court off from important sources of revenue. Just as serious was the new relationship with the Uyghurs, who put great store in their role in preserving the dynasty. From this position they placed pressure on the Tang government, demanding that grandiose titles be given to their rulers, that Chinese imperial princesses be sent to the steppe to marry those rulers, and that the Tang court purchase large numbers of Uyghur horses each year. These demands were seen as both humiliating and harmful to the Tang regime, particularly as Uyghur help had come at a high price; during the rebellion the Uyghurs were twice allowed to plunder the city of Luoyang as a "reward" for their assistance. They had also humiliated the heir apparent at one point, demanding that he perform a dance for them and then beating some of his retinue to death when he refused.¹⁰⁷ The granting of elaborate titles was not particularly problematic, but the granting of three different imperial princesses in marriage to the Uyghur qaghans was unprecedented. Earlier Chinese political marriages had made use of less exalted palace women, but these three princesses sent to wed the Uyghur qaghans were the daughters of Tang emperors, and their bestowal in marriage was a mark of exceptional prestige for the Uyghur

104 There is a great deal of scholarship on the An Lushan Rebellion. For a summary, see Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 447–86.

105 Mackerras, *Uighur Empire*, 14–26.

106 Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 484–97.

107 Mackerras, *Uighur Empire*, 21 and 24–25.

rulers.¹⁰⁸ They celebrated such marriages with extraordinary pomp, for they knew what an unusual favour these ties to the Tang imperial household meant, not only to them, but to the wider world.

The purchase of Uyghur horses was, if not so galling to the Chinese symbolically, still regarded as harmful to them economically. Horses were needed for the Tang military, but prices were high, and the quality of the horses was often poor, or at least so Tang officials sometimes insisted. In fact, the Tang government was often in arrears in its payments for horses.¹⁰⁹ Despite the Tang court's laxity in regard to payments, it is clear that significant Chinese wealth was transferred to the steppe where Uyghur elites made use of it for their own ends. In particular, Uyghur qaghans built cities and fortifications, the archaeological remains of which can still be seen. The most important cities were the capital of Ordubaliq (also known as Karabalgasun) in central Mongolia, near the Orkhon river, and Baybaliq on the Selenga river. Other towns and fortifications were also constructed, especially in the northern marches of the empire.¹¹⁰ There were Sogdian and Chinese communities within the empire,¹¹¹ and from all available evidence Chinese and Sogdian artisans were involved in these constructions and also lived in them once they were complete.¹¹² In building these new urban centres, the Uyghurs departed significantly from the practices of the Türks, who are not known to have built any significant towns or defences. Indeed, the inscriptions of Bilge Qaghan and Kül Tigin make it clear that the Second Türk Empire, at least, was determined to promote a "traditional" steppe way of life and reject Chinese models.¹¹³ There seems little doubt that this new strategy was made possible by the Uyghurs' special arrangement with the Tang court and the wealth that it produced. Much of this wealth must have also gone towards the rewarding of the qaghan's supporters; such transfers of wealth were an important aspect of maintaining political loyalties on the steppe.

The construction of Uyghur urban centres may also have had a significant cultural-political component. Unique in the world, the Uyghur court promoted Manichaeism as its state religion and patronized it lavishly, perhaps in an effort to promote unity within a potentially fractious empire through the religion's universalism. This, too, seems to be connected to their involvement in the An Lushan rebellion. While sources are few, historians have connected Bögü Qaghan's conversion to Manichaeism to his campaign in

108 Pan, *Son of Heaven* 294, 303–4, and 308–9.

109 On this trade see Mackerras, "Sino-Uighur," 218–20 and 238–39; Beckwith, "Horse and Silk Trade"; Pan, *Son of Heaven*, 309–11; and Hayashi, "Uigur Policies," 99–100.

110 Kamalov, "Material Culture," 28–30.

111 See Klyashtorny, "Terkhin Inscription," 345; Moriyasu and Ochir, *Mongorokoku genson iseki*, 172.

112 For more on Uyghur buildings and cities, see Danilov, *Goroda kočevnikov*, 56–66; Arden-Wong, "Eastern Uighur Khaganate," and Arzhantseva et al., "Por-Bajin." On the role of Sogdians and Chinese in the building of Baybaliq, see Ramstedt, "Uigurische Runeninschriften," 35 (plus the revised reading in Klyashtorny, "Terkhin Inscription," 339–41), and Moriyasu and Ochir, *Mongorokoku genson iseki*, 185.

113 Tekin, *Orkhon Turkic*, 261–63; Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 211: 6722.

China in 762–763, where he encountered Sogdian Manichaean clerics in Luoyang.¹¹⁴ This seems odd, since the Uyghurs, like the Türks before them, had ample knowledge of the Sogdians and their culture well before the qaghan's foray into North China. It is unclear as to why it was Sogdians in China who brought about the qaghan's conversion, and it has been argued that his decision to convert, or at least his exposure to the religion, had begun prior to his campaign into China.¹¹⁵ With royal patronage of the religion, the creation of Uyghur cities provided spaces for Manichaean temples and other buildings.¹¹⁶

The promotion of Manichaeism in the Uyghur empire was not without controversy, and there was a brief period in which anti-Manichaean forces gained control over the capital.¹¹⁷ But, in general, Manichaeism remained an important force among the Uyghurs; many of its elites were practitioners and even took Manichaean names.¹¹⁸ The Uyghurs also pressured the Tang government to establish Manichaean temples in cities in both the northern and southern regions of China.¹¹⁹ With the power of Manichaeism came increased Sogdian influence among the Uyghurs; Sogdians acted not only as religious leaders but also played important political and economic roles. The Chinese noted that Sogdians served as advisers to the Uyghur rulers. Furthermore, Uyghur embassies contained large numbers of Sogdians, who engaged in commercial activities while in the Tang state.¹²⁰ They were not alone in this, as Chinese sources note the role of Uyghur moneylenders in Tang cities and Uyghur interest in purchasing tea.¹²¹ Like the Türks, the Uyghurs erected stone monuments to celebrate the achievements of their rulers. One of the most important of these, the so-called Karabalghasun inscription, was written in three languages: Old Turkic, Sogdian, and Chinese.¹²² Although badly damaged, the inscription clearly was intended to display the power of Manichaeism among the Uyghurs.¹²³

Although their role in quelling the An Lushan rebellion had led to significant benefits for the Uyghurs, their continued support of the Tang dynasty could not be taken for granted. A later (764–765 CE) rebellion by another Tang general of Inner Asian origin, a man named Pugu Huai'en, initially caused the Uyghurs to turn against the Tang; this may

114 Mackerras, *Uighur Empire*, 9–10.

115 Clark, "Conversion of Būgū Khan."

116 Dähne, *Karabalghasun*, 27–85, with an English summary on 159–60. Ordubalīq is often referred to by the site's modern name of Karabalghasun.

117 Mackerras, *Uighur Empire*, 10.

118 Drompp, *Tang China*, 40–41n4 and 41n5. These names were derived from Sogdian.

119 Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 193–98.

120 *Jiu Tangshu*, 195: 5210–11; *Xin Tangshu*, 217a: 6126; Hayashi, "Uigur Policies," 101–10.

121 Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 20.

122 Kamalov, "Material Culture," 31–32.

123 The Chinese inscription, which is the best preserved, is translated in Schlegel, *Chinesische Inschrift*. This contains many errors; a new translation is urgently needed. The Sogdian inscription has been translated by Yoshida Yutaka in Moriyasu and Ochir, *Mongorokoku genson iseki*, 215–19. For the Old Turkic, which is the most damaged, see Moriyasu and Ochir, *Mongorokoku genson iseki*, 219–24.

have been because of a marriage connection between Pugu Huai'en and the Uyghur royal family. Only the general's untimely death brought an end to this conflict and restored peace to the Uyghur relationship with China.¹²⁴ Despite its ties to the Tang empire, Uyghur political power in Inner Asia was not unchallenged. The Uyghurs campaigned to the northwest and defeated a large force of Kirghiz in 758.¹²⁵ Although the Tang state was no longer a significant rival, the Tibetan empire continued to contest control of the Tarim Basin and its trade centres. Around 789, the Uyghurs and Tibetans began to contend for control of the northern rim of the Tarim Basin and neighbouring areas. Much of this conflict centred on the city of Beiting (called *Beshbaliq* by the Turkic peoples), which was finally taken by the Uyghurs in 792.¹²⁶ Conflicts between the two empires continued into the ninth century until a peace agreement was reached in 822/823—about the same time that an accord was also made between Tibet and Tang China.¹²⁷ It was at about this time (probably in 821 CE) that the Arab traveller Tamīm ibn Baḥr journeyed to the Uyghur capital of Ordubaliq.¹²⁸ Modern archaeological research has affirmed his description of the city being surrounded by cultivated fields, which would have played a role in the support of the vegetarian Manichaeen clergy there.¹²⁹ It is important to note, however, that (as with Buddhism in the First Türk Empire), it is not clear how far Manichaeism—not to mention sedentary lifeways—penetrated into the general Uyghur population. Succession among the Uyghurs was at times a matter of contention, and more than once power changed hands through violence. A coup in 779 led to a brief crackdown on Sogdian influence; another coup in 795 led to the enthronement of a qaghan from the Ediz (Chinese: Adie) clan, although he adopted the royal surname of Yaghlaqar after taking the throne. It was likely this same man who earlier had managed to strengthen the empire and push the Tibetans from Beiting.¹³⁰

Just as with the Türk realms, multiple factors led to the collapse of the Uyghurs. Court factionalism engendered bloody power struggles beginning in 832. A twenty-year revolt by the Kirghiz people who lived northwest of the Mongolian Plateau in the region of the upper Yenisei river valley also put pressure on the realm. The Kirghiz, who also spoke a Turkic language and used the runiform script of the Türks, had chafed under Uyghur rule for years; it may well have been to ward off their raids that the Uyghurs built a line of defensive structures along their northern frontier. In the end, court factionalism worked to the Kirghiz's advantage when an important Uyghur official betrayed his sovereign and linked himself to the rising Kirghiz power. The winter of 839/840 was a particularly bad one in which many herd animals died, causing famine and disease among

124 Mackerras, *Uighur Empire*, 26–29.

125 *Jiu Tangshu*, 195a: 5201; *Xin Tangshu*, 217a: 6117.

126 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 153–56.

127 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 163–65.

128 Minorsky, "Tamīm ibn Baḥr."

129 Bemmann et al., "Bookmarkers in Archaeology." For an analysis of the site, see Dähne, *Karabalgasun*.

130 Mackerras, *Uighur Empire*, 10.

the Uyghurs. As Kirghiz troops moved into the central plateau, large numbers of Uyghurs fled south for protection. With them was the reigning Tang emperor's aunt, the Taihe Princess, who had been married to an Uyghur qaghan; she had initially been captured by Kirghiz forces but was later recovered by the Uyghurs. Although her presence gave these refugees some leverage, Chinese forces were eventually able to seize the princess in a raid. After that, the Uyghur refugees were unable to come to an accommodation with the Tang court. Although a few were given asylum, most were slaughtered at the frontier. Some Uyghurs found refuge among the Khitans in Manchuria. The collapse of the Uyghur empire soon allowed the Tang government to proscribe Manichaeism in China in 843; the resulting influx of wealth from disestablished temples encouraged the Tang emperor Wuzong (r. 840–846 CE) to extend his persecution to Buddhism and other foreign religions.¹³¹

Although many Uyghurs had fled southward to China, others migrated to the regions of Gansu and the Tarim Basin, where they eventually established new Uyghur states. There they maintained their language and culture, supporting Manichaeism as well as other religions, especially Buddhism.¹³² The Tibetan empire collapsed at about the same time as the Uyghur empire; the assassination of the Tibetan ruler in the midst of a succession dispute led to turmoil and the decline of Tibetan power. One consequence of this was the loss of previously controlled parts of the Tarim Basin, which now came under the control of the Chinese warlord Zhang Yichao. Although Zhang gave his nominal submission to the Tang dynasty, the latter was now too weak to extend its influence and so Zhang remained highly autonomous.¹³³ Because the Tibetan empire had gone into a state of decline at almost exactly the same time as the Uyghur empire, the nascent Uyghur states in Gansu and the Tarim Basin were not threatened by Tibetan power. Instead, they created a flourishing culture that combined nomadic and sedentary elements. The Uyghurs further guaranteed their survival by submitting to the rising power of Chinggis Qan in 1209.

Although they had defeated and destroyed the Uyghur empire, the Kirghiz did not establish a new polity based on the Mongolian Plateau. For a number of reasons they chose to remain in the region of the upper Yenisei; Chinese sources note how difficult it was to make and maintain contact with them. This led to political fragmentation on the Mongolian steppe. New regimes based in Manchuria emerged, first under the Khitans (who held a small part of China proper around modern Beijing), who created the Liao dynasty (916–1125), and then the Jurchens' Jin dynasty (1115–1234), which ruled over nearly half of China. Both the Liao and Jin exercised some level of power in Mongolia, but this tended to be of an indirect nature. The steppe was not their major political concern. This led to a continuation of political disunity on the Mongolian Plateau, which set the stage for the rise of Chinggis Qan.¹³⁴

131 For a closer look at these events, see Drompp, *Tang China*.

132 See Gabain, "Buddhistische Türkenmission."

133 Twitchett, *Cambridge History*, 678–79.

134 See Drompp, "Breaking the Orkhon Tradition," and Drompp, "Yenisei Kyrgyz," for more on the Kirghiz.

Conclusion

The empires created by the Türks and Uyghurs were of great political, cultural, and economic importance in Eurasian history. The Turkification of Inner Asia was promoted by them and continued after their demise; and while the Islamification of the western parts of the region lay in the future, it had begun with the Umayyad takeover of Sogdiana and the increasing presence of Islam in the lands of the western Turkic peoples. With the spread of Turkic power came unprecedented opportunities for international exchanges of goods, people, and ideas. The Türks and Uyghurs were consistently interested in trade with their neighbours and regularly promoted the exchange of goods; one of Bumīn's first acts to strengthen his position as he prepared to throw off the rule of the Rouran was to establish trade relations with North China. Other Türk and Uyghur rulers continued to emphasize trade (and tribute) as an important component of their empires. While the nomads had a limited number of goods to trade (primarily herd animals and furs), they sought a number of products from their sedentary neighbours, including fabrics, metal objects, and other prestige goods. For the nomads, these items were a type of currency of great importance, used by elites to strengthen political allegiances and thereby maintain political cohesion.¹³⁵ Without them it seems highly unlikely that the Turkic peoples of the Early Middle Ages could have created the large and successful polities that they did. For the Uyghurs, this wealth promoted a new approach to empire that involved the building of urban centres and the adoption of a foreign religion. While they did not create cities, the Türks did bring literacy to the steppe through the creation of a native Inner Asian literary language—the first known to us. Although the First Türk Empire was content to use foreign scripts for the few known inscriptions that it created, the elites of the Second Empire purposefully employed a newly devised script to enable them to write texts in their own language, especially the “eternal stones” (Old Turkic *benggü tash*) that celebrated their accomplishments. This script was also used by the Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, particularly the Kirghiz, to create both lengthy state-sponsored inscriptions as well as short personal inscriptions. The nomadic empires that developed after the Early Middle Ages built on this tradition of literacy to create such important works as *The Secret History of the Mongols*.¹³⁶

Because most of the available sources regarding the Türk and Uyghur empires were produced by their sedentary neighbours, it is tempting to concentrate on the historical information that those sources supply and conceptualize nomadic empires primarily in terms of their relationships with sedentary polities which were at times their political rivals and at times their allies—and which were the source of important and desirable goods. But such an emphasis is misleading. From available Inner Asian sources—the inscriptions chiselled into the “eternal stones” that Turkic elites erected—it is clear that the empires under consideration here often focused their attention and energies on the steppe. These inscriptions not only promoted the political legitimacy of those elites but also reveal their need frequently to assert their dominance over subordinate peoples.

135 Stark, “Luxurious Necessities.”

136 On *The Secret History of the Mongols*, see Rachewiltz, *Secret History*.

Legitimacy was derived from supernatural powers as well as earthly achievements. Because subordinate peoples enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in steppe empires, political dominance often required the use of military force and, to be successful, generally yielded benefits for subordinated peoples in the form of security, prestige goods, trade opportunities, marital alliances, etc.¹³⁷ While exchanges with sedentary powers were unquestionably important to nomadic empires, it is vital to see that the multipolar world of the Türks and Uyghurs included a wide range of important steppe interests that are often ignored in sources written by sedentary observers.

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137 See Drompp, "Strategies of Cohesion," and Drompp, "Infrastructures of Legitimacy."

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Chapter 10

WEST ASIA

Khodadad RezaKhani

Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to create a narrative of the history of Iran, 'Iraq, and Syria, defined in their historical sense, from the establishment of Islam to the waning of the 'Abbāsid power, roughly 600–900 CE.¹ The narrative, despite its regional focus, is set within a broader context of global history, highlighting issues of regional geopolitical formation that led to its emergence, indeed ascendance, as a world region in the early medieval period. While “contacts,” the most superficial of “world historical” tropes, are assumed and not emphasized, means of “connection” and mutual influence, as well as paths of integration, are indeed considered and emphasized throughout.²

The period of 600–900 is a crucial one for the history of West Asia. In a common periodization of history, “the end of late antiquity” comes at 602, the assassination of the Byzantine emperor, Maurice.³ Similarly, the rise of the Tulunids of Egypt, the Bagratunis of Armenia, and the Samanids of Khurasan at the end of this period in some sense ushers in the beginning of the Islamic Middle Ages and the end of the so-called “Golden Age of Islam.”⁴ Obviously, historical periodization works more as a tool of modern historians seeking to define specializations and zones of research and influence, and it

1 These terms, despite their application to modern nation-states, have a geographic history, which makes them convenient to use here. I am here using *Iran* to refer mainly to the Iranian Plateau. I use a variation of *'Iraq*, either *al-'Iraq* or occasionally the Middle Persian *Asuristan*, to refer to the Mesopotamian Plain itself. *Asuristan* will be used in what is to follow until there is a definite influence of the Sasanian culture in the region, and I will gradually switch to *al-'Iraq* in later sections to reflect the historical reality as well. *Syria*, based on the same word as *Asurestan* (both mean “the land of the Assyrians”), is used to demarcate what is sometimes called “the Greater Syria,” or in Arabic, *Bilad al-Shām*. This is the area to the west of the Euphrates and east of the Mediterranean that includes modern-day nation-states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and parts of Saudi Arabia and Turkey as well.

2 On the matter of emphasis on integration instead of connection, I am following the sensible description of Sebastian Conrad (*What Is Global History*, 90–91) in considering integration as a much more important element of global history than connectedness or connection. Unlike Conrad though, I do not see the need for a concerted move towards a global integration for us to be able to talk about the global history of a region.

3 Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad*, 8.

4 This term, used quite loosely, is meant more here as a convenient catchphrase, and perhaps by taking a lead from Maurice Lombard; Lombard, *Golden Age*.

reflects less the historical events *per se*. Be that as it may, the Byzantine-Sasanian Wars that preceded, and even occasioned, the Islamic conquests are as good as any event to start this narrative, and the aftermath of the crisis in Samarra and the disintegration of the ‘Abbāsid empire is an apt moment to end it. Within this period, the face of West Asia, already in transformation since the early sixth century, changed significantly. The first significant event, the unification of Syria with al-‘Iraq/Asuristan, was what engendered the creation of the “heartland” of the Islamic empire and its cultural and political centre. The reorientation of West Asia in its entirety towards Baghdad was the direct consequence of this unity. The reorientation by itself brought peripheral populations and powers into contact, exchange, and competition, resulting in the instability of the late Umayyad period. The same phenomenon, miraculously forged into the ‘Abbāsid *cosmopolitanism*, brought the flourishing of the ‘Abbāsid culture in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, but its ephemeral nature might have equally contributed to its instability. The competition, and perhaps the corruption, was too strong to maintain such results for long, occasioning ascendance of forces that pulled the entire enterprise apart and resulted in autonomous and independent polities that we recognize from later centuries. Amidst all this, and throughout, West Asia was reshaped into a region central to the Afro-Eurasian economy, culture, and politics. Its rise in importance, material culture prosperity, and cultural output made it a centre of focus, and thus vulnerable to forces to which it had previously been oblivious and with which it was unconcerned. These forces resulted in events that are far beyond the concern of the present paper—the Mongol conquests, the Crusades, etc.—but whose roots can in many senses be found in the reactions that came about to the developments of the period 600–900. The following is a brief outline of those.

The Sasanian–Byzantine Prelude

The seventh century in West Asia started with a major conflict that has been called “the last great war of late antiquity” or even the real first crusade.⁵ The consuming war between the Sasanian empire and Byzantium (602–628/31 CE) became the defining moment in the history of the region, not only setting the tone for Islamic conquests that followed but also exposing the regional need for territorial integration that was arguably at the root of the conflict itself. In fact, the start of the war, the sudden attack and conquest of Syria by Khosrow II Aparwēz (r. 591–628 CE) from his base in northern al-‘Iraq (Sasanian *Asuristan*) was not an isolated event. It was the continuation of a century of conflict between the two powers, the roots of which dated back to the Anastasian wars of the early sixth century.⁶ The conflicts aside, the wars of the sixth century had a

⁵ This is studied from various aspects, most recently in James Howard-Johnston, *East Rome*, particularly Howard-Johnston, “Pride and Fall.” Additionally, see Stoyanov for a characterization, and justification, of the Byzantine counter-attacks as a *crusade*, quite literally: Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*, Kaegi, *Byzantium*.

⁶ See the relevant sections in Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, as well as longer commentaries by Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*.

major characteristic that extended beyond the issue of territorial control and imperial competition and revealed an institutional need.⁷ Among the most important of these institutional issues was the matter of the shortage of labour and the forceful movement of population by the Sasanian forces, normally out of the northern Syrian territories of the Byzantines into the central and southern regions of Sasanian Asuristan.⁸ The well-known narratives of the founding of a city that looked precisely like Antioch, down to the streets and internal design of the houses, for the resettlement of the Antiochene population tells us more than a little curious anecdote.⁹ Instead, it reveals the deep planning that had gone to the building of such a city and the efforts of the Sasanians to appeal to the resettled population. This is in turn a sign that the relocations were premeditated efforts, and possibly even a major goal of the campaigns, perhaps explaining also the lack of interest on the Sasanian side of controlling the conquered territories. It also demonstrates that the Sasanian domains—at least in their western extent—suffered from shortage of labour and were in need of new workforce.¹⁰

In a sense, the population displacements were not a surprise at all. The population of Asuristan and Syria were culturally and linguistically connected, belonging to the community of Aramaic speakers, and were largely Christian, despite their many Christological differences.¹¹ Their economic activities too, largely due to geographical and environmental factors, were also quite similar, centred on agricultural production, small industries, and regional and interregional trade.¹² Further to the south in Syria and Asuristan, the population was made up of Arab tribes, controlled by the client kingdoms of both empires and in constant motion between the two domains.¹³ It is thus easy to see that, despite imperial borders, the actual demarcation of the borderland populations of both empires was minimal, and it is only natural to think of them as a single population divided among two empires, and by that very fact destabilizing the borders of them both.¹⁴ This single population, however, was limited in its activities, particularly economic ones, due not only to the existence of that very border but also because of the presence of incompatible imperial policies, most importantly perhaps, the monetary arrangements.

7 Part of this competition, from the point of view of war, is reviewed in Howard-Johnston, “Two Great Powers.”

8 The population movements are extensively reviewed in Morony, “Population Transfers.”

9 Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 109. The city was called *Weh-Andiok-Xosrō* “(Built) better than Antioch of Khosrow” and was located on the outskirts of the Ctesiphon capital complex.

10 Morony, “Population Transfers,” 177ff.

11 For a detailed treatment of the political implications of these Christological disagreements, see Wood, *No King but Christ*.

12 For the Roman influence on the regional economy, see Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities*, 171–250. Details, including the role of the Eastern Church in economic activity, are discussed in Villagomez and Morony, “Ecclesiastical Wealth”; part of the issue from the point of view of al-‘Iraq is discussed in Rezakhani and Morony, “Markets for Land,” 248–256 for a discussion of the labour shortage.

13 Fisher, *Between Empires*.

14 In fact, a large part of the conflict was also about the control of these populations, as it becomes clear in the treaty of 562, as detailed by Menander Protector, *Historia*.

The two currencies of the region, one based on a gold standard (Byzantium) and the other a strictly silver currency (Sasanians) resulted in an economic disconnect that had to wait until the late seventh century to be resolved.¹⁵

Perhaps it was in response to these challenges that Khosrow II used the murder of Maurice by the usurper Phocas (602 CE) as a pretext for his invasion and annexation of northern Syria. The rate of the invasions was at first rather slow, concentrated on establishing control over conflict zones like Armenia or the northern Diyala region. Dara, the famous fortress of Anastasius and a major point of conflict, was conquered in 608, and Amida in 609, with Armenia having been secured before. The internal conflict of Byzantium, the war between Phocas and the rebels under Heraclius, allowed for a swift conquest of Edessa and Antioch in 610, and by 613, Damascus was securely controlled, with another Sasanian contingent having advanced to western Anatolia and marching on Constantinople itself. A rebellion in Jerusalem led to its conquest around 614, and by 615, the Sasanian forces had reached Egypt. The province was secured by 618, putting the entire eastern Mediterranean under Sasanian control. Heraclius was ready to abandon Constantinople and set up a new base in his home province of Africa.¹⁶

An interesting aspect of this impressive conquest was the presence of the members of the Church of the East in the Sasanian administration. In addition to Shirin—the Aramaic-speaking and miaphysite wife of Khosrow II—characters such as Yazdin, a highly trusted member of the court and Khosrow's chief treasurer, were intimately involved in the management of the conflict.¹⁷ The True Cross was removed from Jerusalem, presumably at the behest of the leaders of the Church of the East, and was kept and protected—possibly in Karkha bet Lapat, one of the central episcopates of the church.¹⁸ Yazdin removed small pieces of the Cross and sent it as valuable relics to important monasteries, showing both his own authority as well as the importance of the conquests for the church itself.¹⁹ The integration of the territories and their population—the unity of the Christian, Aramaic-speaking population of the region—can in fact be viewed as an alternative solution to the problems of a century earlier, solving the issue of artificial borders and labour shortage by putting the population on both sides of the border under the same authority.

The tide of war reversed from 626 onwards with the campaigns of Heraclius—most likely with significant help from within the Sasanian court and army. By 628, Heraclius

15 Morony, "Economic Boundaries."

16 This is a summary of the information from the primary sources, conveniently collected in Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, 182–97.

17 This is witnessed by the so-called *Chronicle of Khuzistan*; Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, 232–36.

18 Mashayekh, "Khosrow in Jerusalem," 3. The fate of the True Cross became a central part of the peace negotiations that were to follow, for which see al-Tabari's account of the trial of Khosrow II: al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, I: 1046ff. For the importance of the Cross as for the Byzantine counter-insurgency, see Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies*. The Cross seems to have acted as an amulet with magical powers, as the story of Yazdin cutting up parts of it, installing them in bejewelled crucifixes, and sending them to the Nestorian holy men makes clear, *Chronicle of Khuzestan*, 80.

19 Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, 234.

had circumvented the Sasanian army's connection to its western Anatolian contingent and had taken up an unusual route towards Armenia, trying to attack the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon from a northeastern direction.²⁰ Khosrow II was removed in a conspiracy/aristocratic coup on February 24, 628, and was executed following a trial accusing him of mismanaging the war and the management of state.²¹ The Sasanian rule over their empire practically ended at this date, and the rest of the dynasty's twenty or so years were spent in internal conflicts over succession, before its removal from power by the nascent Islamic conquests. Significantly, however, the True Cross was returned to Heraclius in 630 (or 631), after which no report of its whereabouts are known.²² A nominal Byzantine control was restored to Syria and Egypt, although, for less than a decade, as later in 630s, the Islamic conquests permanently removed Byzantine control from these regions.²³

From a global historical point of view, what this episode of West Asian history revealed was the emergence of the region as an internally integrated area with extensive external connections through both wars and economic relationships. The conflict between Byzantium and the Sasanian empire more than anything forced their borderland population, whether Aramaic-speakers or the Arabs, to form an identity for themselves, one that while appearing as alien and perhaps divided from outside had an internal unity that contributed to its survival across the border.²⁴ While wars, spilling out of the eastern Mediterranean region, determined the connections with North Africa and the Mediterranean, further east and in Iran, the commercial relations were becoming increasingly more important. The elimination of the Hephthalite threat to the Sasanians in the 560s and the relative stability of the Western Türk empire had allowed for increased commercial activity, in addition to other economic functions.²⁵ The best studied of these activities is the rise of the Sogdian commercial network in Central Asia,²⁶ but one can study similar phenomena in the Persian Gulf region,²⁷ as well as among the non-Sogdian population of the region. Perhaps an indication of network connections can be found in the proliferation of Eastern Christian (Syriac) churches throughout the Sasanian domains, including as far east as Merv, and its expansion southwards to India where its remnants can be observed in the Syriac churches of South India/Kerala. Connections with China, both through the Central Asian networks and through expansion

20 Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns"; extensive discussion in Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 156–90 and 302. See also Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, 236.

21 Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, 209–26 and 236.

22 Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, 227–28.

23 Kaegi, *Byzantium*, 47–65.

24 It is perhaps an interesting and instructive anecdote, found in Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, 51, that when the Arab armies reached al-Hira, the capital of the Lakhmids, the city grandee who came to meet them was Abdul-Masīḥ b. Buqaila al-Ghassani, a member of the Ghassanid house, in fact the Arab client kingdom of the Byzantines.

25 See Rezakhani, *Reorienting the Sasanians*, 176–84.

26 Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*.

27 Daryaei, "Effect of the Arab"; Malekandathil, "Sassanids and the Maritime Trade."

of religions such as Manichaeism and Christianity, immigrants from Asuristan, enjoyed a more ancient history.²⁸ Contacts with northern India, through both increasing Sasanian influence in the Hindukush region and the expansion of Buddhism into east Iran were forged shortly before the beginning of the seventh century and were to increase in the following century. Evidence for this increased contact is perhaps an interest in translating Indian texts into Middle Persian in the late Sasanian period and its continuation into the Islamic one.²⁹

Islam: From Conquest to Empire

Undoubtedly, the most significant event of the seventh century, one that determined the shape of the Middle East for centuries to come, was the series of military and social events, which are often bound together under the rubric of “the Islamic conquests” (see [Map 9](#)).³⁰ Starting in the 630s and lasting practically until 751, the actual circumstances of the expansion of the Islamic political sphere owed as much to war as to diplomacy, economics, and social elements. As much as their narrative is presented, mainly by later medieval chroniclers but also by modern historians, as a series of predetermined “conquests,” a modern historian, particularly a global historian, would tend to see them within the context of regional and interregional relations and larger late antique and early medieval dynamics.

In short, the so-called birthplace of Islam or the domicile of its founder Muhammad, while located on the edge of the domains of the hegemonic powers of Byzantium, Sasanian Iran, and, to an extent, Axumite Ethiopia, was also very much involved in the interactions of these worlds.³¹ Mecca and Medina, the crucibles of Islam, were located on geographical peripheries of all these powers and had robust relationships with all of them. Meccans enjoyed commercial contacts with Yemen—initially within the Ethiopian and, at the time of the rise of Islam, in the Sasanian sphere of influence—as well as with Byzantine Syria and Sasanian Asuristan. After 621, however, Hijaz, the homeland of Islam, was surrounded on almost all sides by the Sasanians who controlled not only Yemen, but who had recently conquered Syria and Egypt too.³² In a sense, the nascent Muslim polity suffered from a Sasanian “lockdown.” Sasanians were also increasingly seeking to expand their control in Arabia, shifting their policy from leaving the Arab affairs to the Lakhmid kingdom of al-Hira to increased control by the Sasanian emperor via centrally appointed governors.³³

²⁸ Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 43–70.

²⁹ Blois, *Burzoy's Voyage*.

³⁰ The most recent survey of this is Hoyland, *In God's Path*; but Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, includes many more details.

³¹ Bowersock, *Crucible of Islam*, 48–63, for an interesting take on the position of Mecca in the late antique world.

³² Bowersock *Crucible of Islam*, 81–100; Rezakhani, “Arab Conquest.”

³³ al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, I: 1038–39; Fisher, *Between Empires*, 184–86.

West and Central Asia 600-900 CE



Map 9. West and Central Asia 600–900 CE.
© Khodadad Rezakhani.

For the young Islamic state in Medina, this meant that breaking the Sasanian stranglehold was a priority. This is in fact what lies behind the activities of the first decades of the seventh century and the increased movements by the Arab tribes living just outside the Sasanian provinces in southern al-'Iraq and in eastern Arabia against the empire. At the same time, the rise of the Islamic state, under the direct control of Muhammad himself, was concurrent with the conclusion of the Sasanian-Byzantine wars, with the death of Muhammad occurring the year after the return of the True Cross to Heraclius. It is worth noting that the first diplomatic act of the Islamic state of Medina was to create contacts with the Axumite kingdom and seek the protection of its king against the internal enemies of the Islamic state.³⁴ Indeed, the only refuge from imperial conflicts was sought out and exploited, showing the complete awareness and knowledge of the administrators of Medina of contemporary affairs.

It is in the aftermath of the Sasanian-Byzantine wars, and in the undoubtedly uncertain atmosphere of the both empires' control of Asuristan, Syria, and Egypt, that the armies of Islam first move out of their base in Medina. The Battle of the Bridge, near al-Hira, took place in 634, a mere three years after the end of the Sasanian-Byzantine Wars. Al-Hira, the stronghold of the Lakhmids and the seat of the Sasanian governors since the removal of the last Lakhmid king Nu'man III in 602 by the Sasanian Khosrow II,³⁵ probably capitulated peacefully in 635. Yarmouk, further west in southernmost Syria, was the site of the first major battle with a contingent of the Byzantine army in August 636. Al-Qādisiyyah, the first major Muslim victory against the Sasanians, took place in November of the same year just to the south of al-Hira. The capital of the Sasanians, Ctesophon, fell in early 637, with the new Sasanian king/nominal ruler, Yazdgird III, having either never reached it, or only recently managing to control it.³⁶ By 642, both Asuristan/al-'Iraq and Syria were so safely in the hands of the Muslims that they used them as bases to attack and conquer Egypt and the western parts of Iran.³⁷ It seems that Yemen had already capitulated and accepted to be part of the new state even earlier, perhaps already during the time of Muhammad himself. The great vacuum left by the undetermined outcome of the war of 602-631 was quickly filled by forces that were part of the theatre of West Asian politics and also on the edge of it. It is worth noting the part played by the population of the newly conquered areas in further conquests, and in an early shifting of the centre of power from Medina to Kufa (ca. 657 CE), right outside the walls of al-Hira.³⁸

34 Bowersock, *Crucible of Islam*, 71-75, on the background of the Muslim refugees in Ethiopia.

35 al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, I: 1017-39, for the partly romanticized account of the end of the Lakhmid rule in al-Hira. For al-Hira and its position in the Sasanians domains, see Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥira*.

36 For an interesting outcome of the conquest and its spoils, see Shalem, "Fall of Al-Madā'in."

37 The classic study for Egypt is Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt*; much newer material and insights are provided in Sijpesteijn, "Arab Conquest of Egypt."

38 Morony, "Religious Communities," and Morony, "The Effects of the Muslim Conquest." The capital was moved from Medina to Kufa by the fourth caliph, 'Alī: Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, 442.

Kufa and Basra,³⁹ newly established garrison towns, as well as Damascus, were used as central military bases from which further conquests took place.⁴⁰

However, in addition to military activity, the role of political and social forces has to also be acknowledged in drawing the changing picture of West Asia in the middle of the seventh century. The absence of any major resistance by the elite, even the absence of the elites themselves,⁴¹ and the rather quick acceptance of the new system by middling landowners (such as the Sasanian *dihqans* of Asuristan) shows that the incoming administration was in many ways acceptable to local communities. Viewed within the labour-shortage problem of the earlier decades and the social makeup of the region, the conquests in Asuristan and Syria in fact achieved what Khosrow II had tried earlier by effectively uniting the two regions and allowing free communication and exchange between their largely similar populations. The establishment of the port of Basra so early in Islamic history also shows the interest of the new administrators in fostering long-distance connections via maritime routes to India and beyond, and in strengthening the commercial route from Asuristan to the east.⁴² In Syria and Egypt, the local economic activity and commerce was left largely intact. In fact, with the establishment of the Umayyads, particularly the Marwanid house, as the first ruling dynasty of the Islamic empire, Syria became the scene of intense economic activity. Foundation of plantations and desert palaces by the members of the Umayyad house, including Maslama b. 'Abdul-Malik, was a clear effort to make the Syrian territory economically more productive.⁴³ Similar activities were undertaken in southern al-'Iraq, the emerging region of *al-Sawād*, as well as inside the Iranian plateau, where various Arab tribes resettled and started to use marginal and fallow lands.⁴⁴

In the east, the disappearance of both the Sasanian and the Türk empires had allowed for an increasing local activity, both in terms of secondary state formation and in socio-economic terms.⁴⁵ The conquering Muslim armies faced real resistance in the

39 al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-Buldān*, 275–89, on the foundation of Kufa and the later stories associated with it, which is a fascinating window into later historiography's characterization of the early Islamic state.

40 See, for example, al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-Buldān*, 308–10, for the competing roles and claims of the troops from Basra and Kufa in the conquest of Khuzistan and the rest of Iran.

41 It strikes me as curious that, except for a few references (Ibn A'tham al-Kūfi, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, 96), we rarely have information about the presence of the representatives of the great Sasanian families during the period of the conquests. This is discussed and theorized by Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall*, 161–285. See also Banaji, *Exploring the Economy*, 178–203.

42 Basra is located near the ancient port of Apollagos (Sasanian Ubbola), which was already a prosperous port but was perhaps becoming useless because of silting. The new port was founded as an army encampment, much like Kufa's relationship with al-Hira, already in the reign of the second caliph, 'Umar b. Khaṭṭāb: Yāqūt al-Hamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, II: 429.

43 On Umayyad building activities in Syria, see Bacharach, "Marwanid Umayyad," and Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, as well as their place and later context, in Grabar, "Umayyad 'Palace.'"

44 Morony, "Landholding and Social Change."

45 See Grenet, "Regional Interaction," for a summary of the political situation.

area of Sistan and Zabulistan, as well as Tukharistan.⁴⁶ The former were not completely controlled until the second half of the ninth century, while Tukharistan to the north of the Hindukush, despite repeating conquests, essentially remained a frontier zone. Transoxiana, the realm of the Sogdian merchants and their decentralized political system, was conquered several times, and each time reversed its course. Major resistance was offered by Dewaštīc, the ruler of Panjikent and the nominal “King of Sogdiana,” only to be broken by the Umayyad general in 728.⁴⁷ Still, the Muslim conquerors in Bukhara found themselves having to pay the local population to come to the mosque for Friday prayers, and the local elite simply packed up, moved outside the city walls, and built themselves grandiose, fortified palaces, essentially ignoring Muslim rule.⁴⁸

However, this would not have meant a complete segregation of society. Islam and its bearers did penetrate this region, increasingly referred to under the name of *Khurasan* (Middle Persian for “East”) in the eighth century.⁴⁹ The combination of the local converts, migrant client population from al-‘Iraq/Asuristan, and newly settled Arab population provided enough regional manpower, and determination, that in 750, the army of Khurasan, under the leadership of Abu Muslim, managed to remove the Umayyads from power and raise the ‘Abbāsīd house to the caliphate. Sogdians, Türks, and Arabs of Khurasan thus became the determining military and political power of the West Asia in the second century of Islam.

But before this, the Umayyads, the much disliked but important first dynasty of Islam, had created the imperial world that the ‘Abbāsīds inherited. The territorial expansion of Islam as far west as Iberia, east as Central Asia, and north to the Caucasus happened under the watch and management of the Umayyads. West Asia, under their rule from Damascus, became the heartland of the Islamic empire and remains as such until today. ‘Abd al-Malik, 685–705, the second caliph of the second incarnation of the Umayyads,⁵⁰ was a determined administrator, and he was aided in his determination by equally able, although much less popular, bureaucrats such as Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī.⁵¹ After continuing the tradition and experimenting with sub-Byzantine and sub-Sasanian coinage (the so-called Arab-Byzantine and Arab-Sasanian coins) and keeping the realm of the two separate, he finally created his own distinguished coinage and established a bimetallic monetary system.⁵² The Roman *denarius* and Sasanian *drahm* became the Islamic gold *dīnār* and silver *dirham*, with smaller denominations

46 See Bosworth, “Appearance and Establishment,” for a discussion of the early appearance of Islam in the Afghanistan region, as well as Rezakhan, “Arab Conquest,” 176–84, for a brief summary of the events.

47 Grenet and de la Vaissière, “Last Days.”

48 al-Narshakhi, *Tārīkh-e Bokhāra*, 57.

49 See Rezakhanī, *Reorienting the Sasanians*.

50 The definite study of the Umayyad dynasty is Hawting, *First Dynasty*.

51 Dietrich, “Al-Ḥaḍjḍjādī b. Yūsuf.”

52 Heidemann, “Merger,” discusses the issue in some detail. The Umayyad coinage of Syria is discussed in a useful summary by Bates, “Coinage of Syria.”

in copper *fals* and *dānaq*, with a clear exchange rate. These coins, with their characteristic surface covered with Qur'ānic phrases and administrative information, became the blueprint for the entire coinage issues of West Asia, North Africa, Central Asia, and even Iberia and India, for the next several centuries. These coins, issued both by central authorities in Damascus (and later Baghdad) as well as regional authorities and independent kingdoms such as the Samanids, were carried as far as Sweden and Norway and England and formed the backbone of Central Eurasian and Mediterranean commerce through the Early Middle Ages.⁵³

The Islamic expansion, of course, was halted in several places, including Central Asia and Anatolia, as well as famously in the Battle of Tours in 732. Nonetheless, it created an empire extending from Iberia to the Hindukush with an increasingly integrated economy. Some routes of commerce were redrawn, such as the grain production of Egypt, which, instead of providing Constantinople's *cura annonae*, was diverted to the markets of Syria and Iraq.⁵⁴ Other commercial activity was continued, with the Central Asian network to China now being safely oriented towards Iraq. The commercial routes across the Mediterranean were initially interrupted, although with the Umayyad control of half of the Mediterranean region, commercial relationships soon were restored.⁵⁵ The connection to India, the Indian Ocean, and China appear to have experienced a boom due to increasing interest in sea routes.⁵⁶ As far as connections within West Asia and between West Asia and North Africa or Central Asia and the Caucasus were concerned, the political unity contributed to increased exchange and market integration. The development activities, particularly by the Umayyad who encouraged use of marginal lands contributed to a boom in Iraq and Syria, providing the economic background to the so-called 'Abbāsīd golden age in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

The Umayyad "Arabism" and the shifting of the administrative language from Persian or Greek to Arabic appears to have been a regional phenomenon in Iraq and Syria. In Egypt, Greek largely remained the administrative language found on papyri,⁵⁷ and in Iran and Central Asia, New Persian, a pidginized form of Middle Persian, became the "second language" of Islam. This early form of New Persian was the vehicle for the expansion of Islam as a religion, as well as its administrative language in the eastern regions such as

53 The dynamics that led to the mass exportation of Islamic coins to the steppe zone and through there to Scandinavia is itself a fascinating story of inter-regional connections. See Noonan, "Medieval Islamic Copper," and, "Why Dirhams," as well as newer studies by Kovalev and Kaelin, "Circulation of Arab Silver," in addition to Kovalev, "Mint of Al-Shash"; Kovalev, "Commerce and Caravan Routes."

54 For a discussion of Egyptian situation and the changes caused under Islam, see Kennedy, "Egypt as a Province," as well as Morony, "Economic Boundaries," 172–76. A comprehensive study of the Egyptian economy in late antiquity is provided by Banaji, *Agrarian Change*.

55 For a study of Umayyad capitalism and trade in the Mediterranean, see Banaji, "Islam, the Mediterranean."

56 Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, 34–62 and all throughout, with more attention being paid to the later periods.

57 Sijpesteijn, "Multilingual Archives."

Khurasan.⁵⁸ Still, local languages such as Sogdian or Bactrian survived and—alongside the rising importance of the Turkic languages—provided the means of connection across the networks expanding to India and China. The Umayyad Arabization, rather than suppressing the local languages, rather appears to have engendered an administrative language that was adopted throughout West Asia and North Africa, and even most of Iran and parts of the Caucasus, and was later matured as the language into which translations of knowledge from different origins took place.

The first “long” century of Islam, from the start of the conquests in 632 to the rise of the ‘Abbāsids in 750, was the period in which the new system learned to employ and modify what it had inherited from the Sasanians, the Byzantines, and the local traditions.⁵⁹ This inheritance was adopted and shaped into a system, that, despite its late antique roots, was recognizably Islamic and fitted to the time. It also was the period when West Asia was effectively established as a centre, made up of the two formerly separate regions on both sides of the Sasanian–Byzantine borders, now united under an increasingly centralized system. Despite disagreements between Iraq and Syria over ascendancy and centrality in the new system, the local population and their economic system was finally set free of boundaries and allowed to create a new system, one that had already established itself as the heartland of the new state.

From the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution to the Rise of the Peripheries

The Umayyad establishment of an empire was of course not without its problems. The extreme heaviness of Iraq–Syria in the political balance of the Umayyad caliphate naturally caused dissent in the peripheries and perhaps a strain on the coffers as well.⁶⁰ Integration of so many different socio-economic systems into one was not an easy task and was by no means completely achieved under the Umayyad rule. The taxation system, initially left to its own local devices, was at first overburdened by a new set of Islamic taxes (particularly *zakāt*)⁶¹ and then made into a mess by the undetermined application of the poll tax—itself a remnant of the Sasanians—to the population based on their conversion to Islam and participation in activities such as military campaigns.⁶² While taxes were applied on the basis of production in areas such as western Iran, Iraq, Syria, or Egypt, they were still extracted as tribute from regions such as Khurasan that were either newly brought under control or were located in the zone of control of two different powers. The Battle of Talas in 751 illustrates such a disputed zone well. The battle was a

⁵⁸ Utas, “Multiethnic Origin.”

⁵⁹ For a study of this in Iraq, see Morony, “Landholding and Social Change”; Daryaei, “Effect of the Arab,” provides a deeper case study in the province of Fars.

⁶⁰ Grabar, “Umayyad ‘Palace.’”

⁶¹ See Lokkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 38–72 for a discussion of the new taxes.

⁶² See Lokkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, for a general survey and study of various Islamic tax systems; Campopiano, “State, Land Tax,” 8–18, discusses the decrease in tax revenue and relates it to agricultural production.

victory for the Muslims against Tang China, checking the latter's expansion into Central Asia. Apart from the fact of a Muslim victory, it is also evidence that up to the end of the Umayyad rule the Chinese were actively involved in the affairs of Central Asia and competing with the Umayyads and their local agents in Khurasan.⁶³ In the Caucasus, similarly, the continued waves of rebellion by the Armenian potentates and their significant successes showed the limits of the central power of Damascus and, later on, Baghdad.⁶⁴

The imbalance of power resulted in a major rebellion, called the 'Abbāsid Revolution.⁶⁵ Initially based on the internal conflict between the Umayyads and their Hashimite opponents, the 'Abbāsīd house (descendants of al-Abbas, Muhammad's uncle and supporter) and their representative Ibrahim, the movement quickly spread around the Umayyad domains. Most significantly, and famously, it was taken as the rallying cry of Abu Muslim, a local general from Merv in Khurasan.⁶⁶ Along with his mixed troops representing all aspects of Khurasani population, including a neglected but important Sogdian contingent, it managed to overpower the troops of the Umayyad caliph Marwan II in 750. Abdullah al-Saffah, the brother of Ibrahim, who had died in the meantime, was chosen as the first caliph of the new dynasty, with his capital in Kufa. This marked most significantly a move away from Damascus in Syria and a shift of power to al-'Iraq.

Al-Saffah's short reign (751–754 CE) was dominated by his brother, al-Mansūr (known as *al-Dawānīqī* "penny-pincher"), a cunning and able administrator.⁶⁷ It was al-Mansūr who, after succeeding his brother, set about creating a centralized empire and founded the city that is practically synonymous with medieval Islam, the *Madinat al-Salām* ("City of Peace") or *Baghdad* (July 30, 762).⁶⁸ The establishment of Baghdad, and its almost immediate rise to ascendance as the central city of Islamic administration, culture, and politics, is perhaps a testimony to its geopolitical position. An indication of the *longue durée* of the Iraqi dominance in the West Asian balance of power is the

63 See Xinjian and Xin, "Semantic Shift," arguing for a conscious policy of the Tang in expanding to the west of the Pamirs.

64 For a take on the administrative policy in the Caucasus relying on the already existing structures and institutions, see Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 43–77.

65 The 'Abbāsīd revolution is one of the most widely discussed episodes of Islamic history. See Daniel, *Political and Social History*, for a view of the social settings of Khurasan prior to the events of 750–751. Shaban, *'Abbāsīd Revolution*, provides an innovative way of looking at the revolution itself. Vaissière, *Samarqand et Samarra*, is the most comprehensive study of the role of the Central Asians in the affairs of the caliphate and their lasting influence.

66 A compelling argument is made by Shaban, *'Abbāsīd Revolution*, about the make-up of the troops that accompanied Abu Muslim, and Abu Muslim himself; see particularly 153–55. The results are inconclusive and appear to be more tied down to modern nationalism than to historical reality; see Arjomand, "Review of *The Revolution*."

67 An excellent and easy-to-read summary of 'Abbasid history is presented in Kennedy, *Prophet and the Age*, 107–35.

68 Kennedy, *Court of the Caliphs*, is a comprehensive history of the city in its "golden age." Wendel, "Baghdad," explores the mythology associated with it, while Cooperson, "Rhetoric and Narrative," studies the associated literary tropes, including "centrality."

fact that Baghdad is located only a few kilometres north of Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sasanians, and just above Babylon, the ancient metropolis of Mesopotamia. It was the confluence of many trade routes, most importantly the “Khurasan road” which had already determined the direction of commercial travel from Central Asia to the eastern Mediterranean for a millennium. Its location between the Tigris and Euphrates also put it at the confluence of the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean and Anatolian/Caucasus trade. Baghdad was located at the focal point of Syriac Christianity; indeed, it was the site of the patriarchate of Ctesiphon, the central administrative see of the Eastern Syriac Church.⁶⁹ This was coupled with the surroundings of a linguistically diverse world, from the Arabic of the court to the Aramaic in the streets and the Syriac and Persian of the elite and the learned. It is not surprising that it was in Baghdad that the translation movement of the ‘Abbāsīd period took place.⁷⁰ Aside from its cultural outcomes, the movement itself is evidence for the connections and networks that were being oriented towards this new centre. Other than Syriac and Persian, Greek and Latin, as well as Indic tongues such as Sanskrit and perhaps Dardic, were the source languages from which books and their containing knowledge were translated into Arabic.⁷¹ The participants in these activities were mainly the learned elite of the ‘Abbāsīd court, from the Persian Ibn al-Muqaffa’ to the Syriac Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq. But, on the other hand, the participants in the ‘Abbāsīd social project of integrating their empire did include the Bactrian Barmakids, the Sogdian al-Afshin, and the Turkic Bugha al-Kabir—active in administrative and military spheres but nonetheless full participants and components of the emerging Islamic world.

The administrative prowess of al-Mansūr left a stable empire for his successors, although its heavy-handedness guaranteed the underdevelopment of certain institutions, most importantly taxation. These institutional issues, despite providing a general tolerance within the imperial administration, allowed for the formation of rational bases that were to prove detrimental to the empire’s longevity. Of course, the empire had already experienced some losses, in the form of the gradually seceding province of Iberia and the emerging kingdom of Andalusia under the rule of an Umayyad cadet branch. The loss of Iberia was never fully remedied, but it was balanced by a tightening grip on the east and a full effort by al-Mansūr and his successors to bring the rowdy army of Khurasan to heel. Khurasan, in fact, became an integral part of the caliphate, emerging as central component of the new Islamic empire, finally launched in a role for which it was preparing at least since the Kushan period in the first century.⁷² It was through Khurasan that the ‘Abbāsīds forged connections with the Tibetan empire and managed to control

69 Macomber, “Catholicos Patriarch.”

70 The classical study of the ‘Abbasid translation movement is Gutas, *Greek Thought*. His ideas have now been expanded and challenged on many fronts, including Bladel, *Arabic Hermes*, and a different take in Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 1–130.

71 The sources for the knowledge that was translated into Arabic are a matter of constant study, some of which mentioned in Gutas, *Greek Thought*. Specific studies like Griffith, “Aramaic to Arabic,” or Brentjes, “Relevance of Non-Primary Sources,” and the other articles in Ragep et al., *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation*.

72 See Rezakhani, *Reorienting the Sasanians*, and, “Arab Conquest.”

a great part of the steppe trade, as well as attracting the Turkic slave troops that characterize so much of the medieval Islamic world.⁷³ In the Mediterranean and eastern Europe, ‘Abbāsīd caliphs such as the famed Harun al-Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE) fought their Byzantine opponents not only with occasional seasonal campaigns but also with diplomatic efforts such as trying to forge alliances with Charlemagne.⁷⁴

The internal fights of the ‘Abbāsīds following the death of Harun al-Rashīd and the emergence of al-Ma‘mūn (r. 813–833 CE) was a political vacuum that allowed the rise of dissidents around the empire. Based mainly on the experience of Abu Muslim, and in fact presented as revenge for his execution at the hand of al-Mansūr, movements such as that of al-Muqanna‘ or more famously, that of Babak-e Khurramdīn, were challenges to the ‘Abbāsīd centrality that could not be passed on lightly by the caliphal government.⁷⁵ Their successful suppression, however, appears to have revealed more about the avenues through which the central authority could be challenged than any permanent success of the ‘Abbāsīds. The successful career of al-Mu‘taṣīm (r. 833–842 CE), for example, showed the problem of a large military power living close to the caliph and resulted in a temporary shift of the capital to Samarra (836–892 CE), north of Baghdad.⁷⁶ The problem of the Turkic components of the caliphal army and their close connection to Central Asia, as well as increasing influence in ‘Iraq, Syria, and even Egypt, was not really resolved. The policy of the new caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861 CE) in insisting on Islamic laws and limiting the extent of scholarly enquiry only resulted in deepening the dissent and creating genuine, identity-seeking movements around the empire. Perfect integration was indeed in trouble.⁷⁷

The immediate aftermath of al-Mutawakkil’s death and his authoritarian policies was a catastrophe in the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty, exemplified by a succession crisis. Among the four caliphs that followed in the nine years after the death of Mutawakkil, al-Musta‘īn ruled for the longest (862–866), constantly under threat by his Turkish troops and their commanders. The competition with his cousin, al-Mu‘tazz, the son of al-Mutawakkil, resulted in the ascendance of the latter to the caliphal throne (866–869). But even al-Mu‘tazz did not last that long and was again deposed by the Turkish troops. It was not until the relatively peaceful reign of al-Mu‘tamīd, Mu‘tazz’s younger brother (r. 870–892 CE) that relative peace returned, mainly due to the presence of the *éminence grise* al-Muwaffaq (d. 891 CE), al-Mu‘tamīd’s younger brother and general.

However, perhaps the most important outcome of the death of al-Mutawakkil was the disintegration of the ‘Abbāsīd empire itself.⁷⁸ The perfect cosmopolitanism

73 Gordon, *Thousand Swords*.

74 Hodges, “Charlemagne’s Elephant.”

75 A comprehensive study of these movements, and their ideological underpinnings, is provided in Crone, *Nativist Prophets*.

76 Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, provides a superb overview of the presence of the Turkic troops in the caliphal armies and their role in shaping the politics of Baghdad in the ninth century. Also see Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra*, for the specific case of Central Asians in Baghdad and Samarra.

77 Melchert, “Religious Policies,” on Mutawakkil and his successors.

78 Kennedy, *Prophet and the Age*, 136–71, for a summary of the events and their aftermath.

of the ‘Abbāsids, realized so impressively in Baghdad, itself suffered from structural shortcomings and lack of institutional development. All around West Asia, and even North Africa, regional powers began to pull away from the central authority, using some of the institutions created to preserve the central power in the peripheral regions. Even earlier, the caliphal clients and administrators known as the Thirids already had created a semi-autonomous fiefdom for themselves, despite their loyalty to Baghdad.⁷⁹ But the death of al-Mutawakil gave momentum to Yaghub b. Laith al-Saffar, a member of the local *‘Ayyaran* (city-militia) class⁸⁰ to forge extensive influence. In a short period, immediately following al-Mutawakil’s death, Yaghub managed to defeat the local Kharijites and the neighbouring ruler of Zabulistan, the Rutbil, a task that the ‘Abbāsīd troops had not managed for over a century.⁸¹ Yaghub’s power quickly spread northwards to Khurasan and west to Fars/Persis: by 879, when he died in Jundišāpūr, he had conquered most of eastern and southern Iran and was in fact on a campaign to attack Baghdad itself. The short-lived Saffarid kingdom (Yaghub’s brother ‘Amr continued until 900 CE) laid bare more than anything else the structural weaknesses of the caliphal control in the east and paved the way for the much more Buyid and Samanid kingdoms in the tenth century. But, uniquely, it also opened a new path for connection to India by removing the rulers of Zabul and Kabul, remnants of pre-Islamic dynasties of the region.⁸² The southern Hindukush route was the same path that the subsequent Ghaznavids and Ghurids in the eleventh and twelfth centuries took to invade India and bring Islam to South Asia.

Much further to the west and much closer to the caliphal centres in Samarra and Baghdad, the year 861 provided the necessary space for the south Caucasian powers to flex their muscles. Numerous rebellions since the 740s by Armenian *naxarars* had resulted in crushing defeats at the hand of the caliphal troops, most importantly in Bahravand in 775.⁸³ Armenians had tried to buy themselves some place in the caliphal politics by siding with the army of al-Mu’taṣim in 837 when the latter, under the command of Khydr Afshin, had moved against the Khurramid rebel, Babak. The inter-Armenian conflict then gave competing houses, most importantly the Bagratuni family, the opportunity to gain the primary position in Armenian politics, mainly at the loss of the Mamikoneans. After the death of al-Mutawakkil, Ashot V Bagratuni, subsequently known as Ashot the Great, moved against the remaining positions of his rivals and used the crisis in Samarra to annex most of highland Armenia to his family’s position. By 882, Ashot, the “Presiding Prince of Armenia” was strong enough to consider himself the king of Armenia and found the influential medieval kingdom of Armenia.⁸⁴ A relative belonging to a northern branch of the Bagratunis (Georgian: Bagrationi) also elevated

79 See Bosworth, “Tahirids and Saffarids,” and Bosworth, “Tahirids and Arabic Culture,” on the loyalty of the Tahirids and particularly their interest in Arabic culture and literature.

80 Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers*.

81 Bosworth, *History of the Saffarids of Sistan*.

82 Forstner, “Ya’ Qūb b. Al-Laiṭ”; Kuwayama, “Horizon of Begram III.”

83 Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 213.

84 Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, p. 8–9.

himself from the presiding prince of Iberia (Caucasian Iberia or Georgia) to the king of that land and took the region closer to the Byzantines.⁸⁵ The Caucasus route was so effectively closed to the ‘Abbāsids so that when, in the 920s, an envoy, Ibn Fadlan, and his entourage were sent by the caliph al-Muqtadir to the qaghan of the Bulgars, they had to take the long route to Khurasan and Khwarezm and proceed to the northern Pontic steppe in that way.⁸⁶

In the west, the ‘Abbāsīd authority was devastatingly lost to the upstart and ambitious Ahmad ibn Ṭūlūn. In 868, this Turkish mercenary had succeeded as the military governor of Egypt loyal to the caliph.⁸⁷ But it was shortly after the succession of al-Mu’tamid and as the aftermath of the succession of al-Mu’tazz that he became the effective autonomous ruler of the region. In late 870s, he even attacked Syria and fought his superior, al-Muwaffaq, unsuccessfully for the control of that region.⁸⁸ In Egypt, he continued issuing coins with the name of the caliph but also added his own name and established a new system of taxation that probably greatly contributed to the strengthening of Tulunid power, independent of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, in the region.⁸⁹ He was, in fact, quite independent and in the early 880s attempted to control Syria, a task he partly achieved in the south. When he died in 884, his “governorship” passed without any trouble to his son, Khumarūya (Arabic: Khumārawayh), and thus the first Islamic dynasty of Egypt was established. Despite occasional successes, the country never returned to the control of Baghdad and eventually became the centre of the rival Isma‘ili Shi’a caliphate of the Fatimids (969–1171 CE).⁹⁰

Essentially, the end of the ninth century was also the end of the ‘Abbāsīd rule as an empire. The east was lost to the local powers of Khurasan and eventually Dailam region, while the north was blocked off by the petty kingdoms of the Caucasus. Egypt and eventually Syria, and even northern ‘Iraq also formed their own local dynasties that became the roots of the medieval powers of the Fatimids, Ayyubids, and the Mamluks in the eleventh to sixteenth centuries. The ‘Abbāsīd caliphate was slowly reduced to the caliphate in Baghdad, with little power extended beyond the borders of Baghdad and its hinterland. It still is a sign of its resilience, and deep roots within the West Asian world, that even this reduced form survived as a spiritual force until the thirteenth century, when it was only destroyed when the Mongol Ilkhan Hülegü razed the *Madinat al-Salam*, Baghdad itself, to the ground.

85 On the competition and the political environment of the Caucasus in this period, see Vacca, “Conflict and Community.”

86 Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, is the eyewitness account of this journey, one that might indeed have other reasons as a pretext as well—including the competition with the Samanids to access the steppe route. It is still interesting that the mission takes such a long and arduous road and does not even contemplate taking the Caucasus path.

87 Randa, “Tulunid Dynasty.”

88 Bacharach, “Palestine in the Policies.”

89 Satō, *State and Rural Society*, 4–5.

90 Bacharach, “African Military Slaves,” 470–82.

The 'Abbāsīd caliphate, through its most prosperous way, reshaped the face of all of West Asia as a world region. Baghdad became the definite centre of focus, not only for 'Iraq, its traditional region of influence, but also for Central Asia, Iran, Syria, and Egypt. Trade routes coming from the Khurasan road, from the Caucasus, from Egypt, and from the sea route of Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf were all diverted towards Baghdad. The ports of Basra and Siraf became the main suppliers of Baghdad, and cities of Neishapur, Rayy, and Hamadan, as well as Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, and Mosul, became rich from being on the path to Baghdad. It was also the focus of all knowledge, both translations from Syriac, Greek, Middle Persian, and Sanskrit, but also disputations between philosophers and the learned of all creeds. Books were written about and in Baghdad that continued to influence the West Asian and European worlds for centuries to come. War too was oriented towards it, with campaigns against Byzantium and the Caucasus being directed through it, and threats of war being suppressed through diplomacy with Central Asia. In short, West Asia in the Early Middle Ages was certainly the focus of the west Eurasian region, and Baghdad was its centre in turn.

Conclusion

From the perspective of global history, the connected forces that had created many conflicts as the result of political divisions, finally came under a unifying control during this period. The regions of Syria and 'Iraq—demographically, culturally, and economically quite similar—were brought under the same central political control, and a bimetallic currency system facilitated their economic interaction and connection. The capitals of Damascus and, most importantly Baghdad, refocused the socio-economic and political activities of the entire region, as far east as Central Asia, and created a form of unity that has been marked as a civilizational centre by scholars such as Marshall Hodgson.⁹¹ Whether we accept this sort of characterization or not, it is undeniable that geo-historical units such as West Asia did start to show an internal coherence. These were, of course, not permanent and resulted in disintegration of the unit politically. However, the socio-cultural and partly even the economic cohesion were preserved for centuries to come, and even down to our own period.

In terms of contacts and relations with the outside and with neighbouring cultural units, West Asia started to occupy a central role of its own. As a connecting region between Central and South Asia on one side and North Africa and the Mediterranean/eastern Europe on the other, West Asia became the focal point of connections, communication, and diffusion. The routes of commerce that passed both through the sea paths from the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, as well as the land routes to China, through the steppe, and through Egypt to North and sub-Saharan Africa, were essential to the economy of West Asia itself, as well as to that of these neighbouring regions. The accumulated wealth of the caliphate too was an impetus for this, exposing both a strength and a vulnerability. Its internal integration, a great achievement of the late antique and early Islamic periods, in a sense guaranteed such attraction, in both commercial and

91 Hodgson, "Interrelations of Societies," 233.

cultural senses, for a long time to come. If for nothing else other than this, the period 600–900 can indeed be called a “global moment” in West Asia.

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Chapter 11

BYZANTIUM

Michael J. Decker

BYZANTIUM, THE EASTERN Roman Empire, is unique in world history as the only territorial empire to have lost three-quarters of its lands and maintained its political identity for another seven centuries. The immense importance of the history of the seventh through ninth centuries cannot be lost on us, as it was during this time when the last of the three great global monotheisms of today emerged in the Arabian Peninsula and, after defeating the major political powers of western Eurasia, came to dominate most of the Mediterranean world. The first followers of Islam, a “community of believers” in the words of Fred Donner, challenged the two superpowers of the day in western Eurasia—the Persian Sasanian and Byzantine empires.¹ In a series of decisive encounters, these challengers would defeat both empires and drive Byzantium from its lands in the Levant, Egypt, and Africa.

When one looks at the map of Byzantium of the Early Middle Ages (see [Map 10](#)), what is immediately arresting is the loss of territory the empire suffered after the sixth century, when it had controlled lands from the southern tip of Spain, North Africa, and Italy to Egypt and the Levantine sea coast. Equally noteworthy is the loss of control over the interior of the Balkan Peninsula, which the empire had essentially abandoned in the seventh century. Indeed, it has been recently suggested that most former imperial territories north of the Haemus (Balkan) mountains, were depopulated.² East Roman political and economic power was based on the sea and dependent on control of it, notably naval dominance of shipping. Five seas—the Black, Marmara, Aegean, Adriatic, and Mediterranean—provided the sinews by which Byzantine political and economic influence was maintained. Indeed, the material evidence especially indicates that the maritime possessions of the empire, namely coastal Asia Minor, Italy, Sicily, Crete, and the Crimea, passed through the tumultuous years of the seventh and eighth centuries if not unscathed, then more populous and perhaps even materially more advantaged than has been previously thought.³

The traditional narrative of Byzantium in the seventh and the first half of the eighth centuries as a moribund state, eclipsed by the neighbouring Muslim caliphate which dominated western Eurasia, is a compelling one. Throughout the seventh century, the Byzantines had lost an estimated three-quarters of their people and state revenues.⁴ Most crippling of these losses were the cities of Antioch in Syria, Jerusalem in Palestine,

1 Donner, *Muhammad*.

2 Curta and Gandila, “Hoards and Hoarding.”

3 Decker, *Hateful Earth*.

4 Hendy, *Monetary Economy*.



Map 10. Cities of early medieval Byzantium.

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and Alexandria in Egypt. Together these urban entities accounted for at least 1 million people and the bulk of the material, intellectual, and spiritual capital of the empire.⁵ The loss of these territories to the Sasanian Persians in 610–628 has been cited as one of many reasons for this estrangement between Constantinople and the eastern provinces. Of course, none of these are necessary to explain Byzantine defeat at the hands of the Arabs; whatever the nature of the early conquests, Byzantium lost territories that had been under the sway of Hellenic political and cultural systems for a millennium and which had for three centuries been governed from Constantinople. Scholars will continue to debate the nature of these changes and their significance, but it is clear that by the late seventh century and into the eighth century, the Byzantine emperor had lost control of the interior of a large portion of the Balkan peninsula, ceded huge portions of the Anatolian subcontinent either to Muslim control or to a no-man's land, and squared off unsuccessfully against a new Bulgar polity north of the Danube.

At first glance, by 750, the empire does not appear to be in much better trim than it was 100 years prior. In the first decades of the new century, a series of political crises had rocked the imperial system with what some have termed the “twenty years’ anarchy,” reckoned to have spanned the era from the fall of the house of Heraclius with the first deposition of Justinian II in 695 until the rise of Leo “the Isaurian” in 717.⁶ The intervening decades witnessed the reign of six emperors, including the brief return of the despotic Justinian II (r. 705–711 CE), considerable unrest in the provinces led by factions in the army, and a sharp economic decline as measured in the money supply of the empire (on this, see below).⁷

Military Conflicts with Neighbouring Polities

From the sixth through the ninth century, the empire continuously communicated with its neighbours through war, diplomacy, and trade and less so through migration and disease. Since the administrative division of the Roman empire into eastern and western halves under Diocletian (284–305 CE) and the subsequent establishment of Constantinople in 324 CE by the emperor Constantine (306–337 CE), the Byzantines had faced instability on their northern border along the Danube river. The movement of a litany of tribal confederations such as the Goths and Huns into the Roman orbit along this frontier often brought these groups into military confrontation with the empire. However, the relationships between the empire and its northern neighbours also involved considerable diplomatic efforts and frequently the payment of subsidies to dissuade groups on the border from invading imperial territory. In this region, as well as many others, the sixth century marks a watershed, with invasions of imperial territory by groups like the Slavs and Bulgars, whose impact in the region would be permanent.⁸ The expansionist policies of the emperor Justinian (r. 527–565 CE) left

5 Decker, *Hateful Earth*.

6 Kaegi, *Military Unrest*, 186–208.

7 Treadgold, *State and Society*, 323–45.

8 Curta, *Neglected Barbarians*.

the empire fiscally and militarily overcommitted, with picaresque military adventures that led to the conquest of North Africa (533–534) and Spain (552), while the invasion of Italy led to a protracted and exhausting war on the peninsula (535–554); in 568, the Lombard king Alboin (r. 560–572) found Italy easy pickings for his Lombard super-tribal confederation.⁹

Byzantium battled on some front in every decade from 600 to 900.¹⁰ Militarily the empire was locked in violent struggles on both of its major frontiers to the north and east. To the north, the empire faced Slavic tribal groups, some of whom came to settle inside imperial territory, probably over the course of the late sixth century, as Slavic tribal groups—not to be confused with groups possessing a unified Slavic identity—are noted in the miracles of St Demetrius ca. 700.¹¹ More menacing was the formation of the Avar qaghanate in the Pannonian plain north of the Danube; here the open grasslands formed the last extension of the great Eurasian steppe and thus provided a welcome environment. An embassy from the Avars who had been defeated by the Gök Türks in Central Asia had subsequently fled west; a Gök Türk embassy to Justin II told the emperor that the Avars who fled west numbered 20,000.¹² Through a clever combination of diplomacy, extortion, and military force, the Avar qaghanate came to dominate a vast area north of the Danube between the lands of the eastern Franks and Byzantium. The Avars attained the peak of their power in the first quarter of the seventh century when the empire, wracked by conflict with the Sasanian Persians, could no longer support the Balkan armies who held the qaghanate in check; evidence from coins indicates that most Roman troops had been transferred from Greece to Anatolia by the middle of the seventh century.¹³ In 626, with the conflict in its twenty-fourth year, the Avars besieged the capital of Constantinople in a coordinated attack with the Persians in what would mark the turning point of the war.¹⁴

Following the decline of the Avar qaghanate through civil war, the Bulgars conquered much of the northern Balkans in 680–681.¹⁵ In the fifth century, groups of Bulgars, identified in the texts as Utigurs, Onogurs, and Kutrigurs, had arrived on the northern borderlands of Byzantium from the western Pontic steppe. Groups of Bulgars had raided imperial territory from the sixth century onwards but had eventually fallen under the power of the Gök Türk empire in the east and the Avars in the west. By the end of the seventh century, Bulgar groups had established themselves in the delta region of the Danube where they challenged imperial authority. They defeated the emperor Constantine IV (r. 668–685 CE), who signed a treaty ceding portions of the northern Balkans to the

9 Humphries, “Italy, AD 425–605”; Moorhead, “Ostrogothic Italy.”

10 On these conflicts, see Haldon, *Byzantine Wars*.

11 Curta, *Edinburgh History*, 281.

12 Kyzlasov, “Northern Nomads,” 323.

13 Curta, *Edinburgh History*, 92.

14 Howard-Johnston, “Siege of Constantinople.”

15 Vida, “Conflict and Coexistence,” 31.

Bulgars and agreed to the payment of tribute.¹⁶ In 708, the Bulgars were victorious again near Anchialos in the delta region, and, around 716, another treaty followed the reinstatement of Justinian II on the Byzantine throne. The agreement provided for safe travel between the two polities and regulated trade through the use of certificates and lead seals.¹⁷ Although warfare between Byzantium and Bulgaria continued throughout the eighth century, including another imperial defeat at the Battle of Marcellae in 792, these did not threaten the survival of either polity who were becoming more culturally and economically tied to one another.

The East Romans also maintained complex relationships with the Slavic groups who had established themselves in the southern Balkans, though imperial policy regarding these smaller, politically disparate entities was on the whole much more successful than against the Bulgars. Near the close of the eighth century, the empress Irene marched throughout Thrace and brought to heel tribes in northern Greece, even if Byzantine political domination and cultural Hellenization would take decades to solidify. In the west, too, the empire found itself in retreat. After putting down several rebellions, Leo squared off against the bishop of Rome, Gregory III (731–741 CE), who followed his predecessor Gregory II (715–731 CE) in resisting imperial taxation in south Italy. Both Gregorysts had opposed the emperor's turn towards iconoclasm (the destruction of religious figural images), and Leo punished this defiance. The emperor forcibly transferred ecclesiastical authority of Calabria, Sicily, and Illyricum on the Adriatic coast from the pope in Rome to the patriarch of Constantinople. The Sicilian lands of the papacy annually rendered the considerable sum of 350 pounds of gold (or about 25,000 gold *nomismata*) to the see of St Peter, and the loss to the papacy was therefore substantial.¹⁸ These entanglements were part of wider disturbances that ended in the loss of the north of the peninsula in 751 with the fall to the Lombards of Ravenna, the imperial administrative capital and most important western bastion. Thereafter, the empire was forced to retreat from northern Italy, remaining influential only in Venice and a sliver of the northern Adriatic. Losses in Italy were exacerbated by the serious economic and fiscal crisis that continued to grip the empire through the middle of the eighth century.¹⁹

The struggle in the east and south was even more grave. The sixth century had opened with the end of a long period of quiet between the two great powers of late antiquity, with hostilities commencing in 502 and continuing sporadically throughout the century; major periods of confrontation spanned the years 530–532, 540–557, and 572–591.²⁰ At the close of the century, however, the empire benefited from a stroke of luck which the emperor Maurice (r. 582–602 CE) deftly seized. The Sasanian shah, Khosrow II Aparwēz (590–628 CE), was overthrown in a palace coup and fled to the East Roman frontier as a suppliant. Maurice sent an army, which successfully reinstalled Khosrow in 591,

16 Treadgold, *State and Society*, 329.

17 Shepard "Slavs and Bulgars," 231.

18 Theophanes, *Chronicon*, 568–69.

19 Decker, *Hateful Earth*, 71.

20 Greatrex *Rome and Persia*; Greatrex and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, 82–175.

after which the empire benefited from a favourable peace treaty that returned considerable territory along the eastern frontier and brought more than a decade of peace. This favourable situation was shattered upon the death of Maurice who himself fell to a military revolt aided by a fifth column in the capital; on the pretext of avenging his slain benefactor, Khosrow invaded Byzantium in 602, a stroke that found the Roman defences in chaos and thus met swift success. The Persians ranged over the whole of the Levant and captured the great cities of the eastern provinces; Antioch fell in 616, and three years later Alexandria succumbed. Less surprising than the initial failure of the early years of the emperor Heraclius (610–641) was his ability to remain in power in the wake of defeat. This is especially confounding since Heraclius had claimed the throne as a usurper who had ousted the murderer of Maurice, Phocas (602–610). Phocas himself had risen to power on the wave of hostility to Maurice born of the latter's extreme economizing measures. Like Maurice, Heraclius was forced to economize, but, unlike Maurice, Heraclius introduced a small silver coin, the hexagram, into circulation and lowered the size of the main copper currency, the *folles*, from 11 grams to 9 grams. He also took on a massive loan from the church whose centuries of acquisition of ecclesiastical silver plate provided the money with which he could pay his troops and broker an alliance with the Gök Türk empire against the common Sasanian foe.²¹

Then the empire was locked in a tremendous fight with the Dār al-Islām. Following serious defeats in the initial waves of the Muslim conquests of third decade of the seventh century, Byzantium had retreated from the Levantine sea coast and withdrawn behind the natural barrier of the Taurus mountains in Anatolia. In the process, the state had lost approximately three-quarters of its population and revenue. Given that the single largest state expenditure was the army, the decline in resources available to the emperor meant a sharp reduction in the number and quality of troops available.

Both powers contested the Anatolian frontier zone which was broad and undefined. Umayyad commanders led summer raids annually, called *sa'ifa* from *sayf*, "summer," when the expeditions were mounted so as to avoid campaigning in the harsh cold of the Anatolian highlands.²² These expeditions varied in size and intensity and in the main aimed at plunder rather than permanent conquest. The frontier cities of Tarsus and Malatya had developed, likely in the early eighth century, as bases from which the Umayyads could prosecute the *jihad* against the Byzantines, a struggle that had gained a greater urgency and eschatological sense of purpose ever since the prolonged siege of Constantinople in 674–678. In the 750s, the Anatolian frontier was very much a work in progress, with the settlement of Arab tribesmen to serve as soldiers and settlers and to provide a buffer for the caliphate.²³

Though the army was effective enough to help stalemate the conflict against the overextended Muslims, Byzantine military successes were few. Two decades after surviving the siege of 717–718 in which the empire received substantial military aid from

21 Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 90.

22 Bosworth and Latham, "Sa'ifa."

23 Eger, *Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 238.

the Bulgars, in 740, imperial forces led by Leo III and his son, Constantine, won a major victory over the Muslims at Arkoinon in central Anatolia, but this was not a significant turning point in relations between the empire and caliphate. The eighth century ended with the Byzantines paying tribute to the newly established ‘Abbāsīd state under the caliph Harūn al Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE). The move of the ‘Abbāsīd capital from Damascus to Baghdad and the orientation of the caliphate on Iraq reflected a turn away from the Levant and was symptomatic of the increasing regionalization of the Muslim world.

The seventh century began in promising fashion. With peace attained with Persia in the closing decade of the sixth century, the empire was poised to recover. With the freeing of troops from the war with Persia, Maurice was able to move to the offensive against the Avars in the Balkans, a policy that led to considerable success, including a major victory in 599 at the Battle of Viminacium in Pannonia, when the core of the Avar empire was shaken by the East Roman counterstroke.²⁴

Internally, the first half of the eighth century also seemed unpromising. Though with the accession of Leo III (r. 717–741 CE) political instability ended for a time, in 726, after consolidating power in the wake of his victory in the siege of Constantinople, Leo provoked widespread consternation by covering over prominent religious images. Leo’s actions, and those of his successors, earned him the epithet “Saracen minded,”²⁵ a moniker due in no small part to the fact that Leo apparently spoke Arabic and Greek with equal facility but also because he instituted the policy of iconoclasm, which Byzantine writers believed came from the Islamic world.²⁶ The emperor’s edict marked the start of the period known as iconoclasm, one of image-breaking and prohibitions on the depiction of the godhead. The authors of our written sources—who wrote from the opposite, iconophile side as those who favoured the veneration of religious images and who ultimately proved victorious—depict the eighth and early ninth century in Byzantium as one of gloom and religious turmoil. The sparse historical texts were largely written by icon-supporting clerics whose victory was assured with the permanent restoration of icon veneration after the death of the iconoclast emperor Theophilos (d. 842 CE) in the synod of Constantinople of 843 (the so-called “Triumph of Orthodoxy”).²⁷ While scholars continue and will continue to disagree about the consequences of iconoclasm within the empire and in the world of Christian politics, there can be little doubt that Byzantine policy in the eighth century heavily influenced the turn of the papacy towards the north and the Carolingians in the west. At the same time, the failure of the caliphate to conquer Constantinople played no small part in the overthrow in 750 of the Umayyads. In 717 especially, the stunning failure of *jihad*, which was ideologically deeply identified as reflecting the will of God and the Dār al-Islām as his chosen people, shook the foundations of Umayyad authority. The armies of Damascus could not—or would not—occupy sufficient imperial territory to provide secure bases from which to advance their

24 Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia*, 194–214.

25 Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, 142.

26 Theophanes, *Chronicon*, 555.

27 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 165–98.

attacks, and consequently the Byzantines were able to use the size of their territory to their advantage.

Trade and Diplomacy with the Wider World

Beyond the dimension of conflict in which the Byzantines engaged in every decade of the early medieval period, there were other registers of contact, including the exchange of populations, the large-scale movement of slaves and prisoners of war, religious pilgrimage across frontiers, diplomatic missions, and exchanges in the microbial world in which Byzantium shared with its Eurasian neighbours near and far. A series of land and water routes loosely joined the capital with western Eurasia. Constantinople served as an admirable hub city, possessing excellent access to the sea. It has been recently rightly re-emphasized that Constantinople is not a Mediterranean city but rather a city on the Sea of Marmara with a climate and environment quite distinct from the Mediterranean and classical Rome.²⁸ The Sea of Marmara in turn interfaced with the Black and Aegean seas, and thence the Mediterranean. The Black Sea provided not only a rich fishery for the empire but an avenue to economic, diplomatic, and cultural contacts conducted along its shores. The focal point of Byzantine political power along the Black Sea was Kherson in the Crimea. Though used as a place of exile, Kherson was a moderately important city, with a regular grid, a number of Byzantine churches, and regular long-distance traffic in goods.²⁹ Further west, the empire held sway over enclaves in the western Balkans along the Adriatic and the Mediterranean to the south Italian coast and Sicily. The island was one of the most important imperial possessions, with important corn lands and a number of small cities which were well connected to Constantinople. The legendary life of Leo of Catania hints at the close contacts between the island and capital, and the remains of material culture from the island also tell of a strong interconnectedness between the western periphery and the imperial centre.³⁰ Along the Black Sea littoral, Byzantine contacts, trade relations, and influence remained, even though the rising power of the Khazars in the south Russian steppes made life difficult there for the empire; although the Khazars seized Cherson in the eighth century, Byzantine Christianity and urban life remained vital.³¹ The western extramural church at Cherson, for example, was built in the eighth century, and Byzantine political interest in the region remained strong.³² We know from later sources that the Crimea remained the primary outpost of the empire in its relations with and monitoring of the peoples of the steppe lands of south Russia at least until the end of the tenth century.³³

28 Cameron, "Thinking with Byzantium," 50.

29 Romanchuk, *Geschichte und Archäologie*, 147.

30 *Vita Leonis Cataniae*, 178, 185.

31 Smedley, "Cherson."

32 Romanchuk, *Geschichte und Archäologie*, 85.

33 Madgearu, "Place of Crimea."

It is uncertain whether the routes of exchange used by the Jewish merchants, the so-called “Radanites” (*al-Rādhāniyya*) in the middle of the ninth century as described by the Persian geographer Ibn Khuradādhbeh (ca. 820–912 CE) were similarly travelled in the eighth. In much-debated and controversial passages, Ibn Khuradādhbeh described long-distance trade routes that linked Frankia and al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) in the west with China in the east via four main paths. The first of these was a sea journey from “the lands of the Franks” in the Mediterranean and to Pelusium on the western coast of the Sinai Peninsula and to Kulzum (ancient Clysma) on the Red Sea. From there, the merchants took ships to India and China. The second route was by ship to Antioch in Syria, then down the Euphrates to Baghdad, then to Basra and the Gulf to Oman and India and China. The third, an overland route, passed from Frankia to Andalus to Tangier in Morocco, to Kairouan and eventually across Libya and Egypt, to Damascus and Syria and then on to Baghdad and thence to India and China. The fourth route was a northern itinerary, passing to the north of Rome, through the land of the Slavs, across the south Russian steppe to Khamlij (Atil), capital of the Khazar empire, then on to Balkh in Afghanistan, through the Taklamakan and into China.³⁴ Since Atil was the Khazar capital in the eighth century, and we know of similar exchanges of people, goods, and information that traversed the south Eurasian steppes—for example the embassies between the Gök Türks and Justin II that solidified the Roman–Turkish alliance against the Sasanian Persians in the 560s and 570s—it is tempting to impose a certain continuity on these routes and the exchanges they facilitated.³⁵ Certainly Byzantine goods reached Khazaria; excavations from the Crimea eastward have yielded eighth-century Crimean amphorae, pottery, buckles, and coins that indicate a range of goods passed from Roman to Khazar hands through Tmutarakan and other settlements.³⁶ The surprising discovery of lapis, for example, in eighth-century wall paintings of the church of San Sabas in Rome points to Mediterranean contacts with Badakshan and, no doubt, even further east and prefigures the sumptuous Byzantine family church at Tokali Kilise in Cappadocia.³⁷

The fact that apparently none of the routes east passed through Byzantium is surprising. The *kommerkion*, the duty levied on goods imported into the empire, was apparently 10 percent;³⁸ this is the same rate we know was charged to foreign merchants by the caliphate; a text ascribed to the caliph Umar (r. 634–644 CE) states that the Muslim tithes was justifiable because it was the rate charged by the *Rūm* (Romans).³⁹ Such a low rate seems unlikely to have deterred merchants. Perhaps in the areas to the north, where political power was fractured and central authority weak, there were lower tariffs. Whatever the reason, it is interesting to see in the Radanite itineraries that Constantinople—indeed any Byzantine city whatsoever—is altogether absent. Would it truly have been

34 Pellat, “al-Rādhāniyya.”

35 Menander Protector, *Historia*, Fr. 10.

36 Noonan, “The Khazar Economy.”

37 Gaetani et al., “Egyptian Blue.”

38 Oikonomides, “Role of the State.”

39 Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations.”

so easy to avoid the lands of the empire? It seems difficult to believe that ships sailing from the west could bypass the Peloponnese, Aegean Islands, Crete, or Cyprus on their way to the Levantine ports of Islam, especially when winds and currents, as well as the quality of anchorages favoured the northern routes in the Mediterranean. In any case, Ibn Khordadbeh does mention that Radanite merchants went to Constantinople on their return journey, carrying camphor, aloe, musk, and cinnamon.⁴⁰

Islands in the Aegean, such as Crete, and in the Mediterranean, such as Sicily and Cyprus, served as entrepôts of travel and trade. Following the treaty of 685, the revenues of Cyprus, along with those of Armenia and Caucasian Iberia, were divided equally between the caliphate and the empire. Cyprus was contested space which nonetheless remained in the imperial political orbit even if it continued to pay tribute to the Muslims. After the destruction in 747 of a Muslim fleet from Alexandria, the 'Abbāsīd governor of Syria made several attacks on the island, which nonetheless was firmly within the grasp of Constantinople. Despite the evidence for a serious economic downturn over the empire, Cyprus apparently continued to produce some well-known types of pottery in continuous production since the late antique period and to traffic with the caliphate, especially Egypt.⁴¹ On the whole, it seems as though the Mediterranean and Aegean Islands under imperial control enjoyed trade relations with the Muslim Levant, though much of the movement of goods probably involved barter or other forms of cashless exchange: we know from texts and ceramic finds that goods moved back and forth, but the supply of coinage is slight when compared with earlier periods.⁴² In the later part of the eighth century, the annual fair at Ephesus in southern Asia Minor yielded a *kommerkion* of some 100 pounds of gold, meaning that gross transactions amounted to at least 1,000 pounds.⁴³ It is difficult to believe that the trade at Ephesus, whose port status was declining because of silting of the once-famous harbour, was solely internal to the empire; there was likely at least some foreign merchandise from Syria and elsewhere in the caliphate (see below).

As in all pre-modern periods, travelling overland in early medieval Byzantium was more difficult than sailing, and thus most trade and travel was maritime. Two main trunk roads bound the hinterland of the empire to the capital. In the west, it was the old Via Egnatia, which extended 1,120 kilometres from Constantinople, through Macedonia, and terminated at Dyrrachium (Durrës in Albania). McCormick argues, based on the meandering itinerary of Constans II in his 662 visit to Athens, that the Via Egnatia was not viable in our period and instead was replaced by multiple smaller routes.⁴⁴ In Anatolia, there ran the ancient main road from Chalcedon, via Nicomedia, Ankara, Caesarea, and thence to the east through Melitene. From Caesarea one could also travel a northern branch route through Sebasteia (Sivas) which took one to Trebizond

40 Pellat, "al-Rādhāniyya."

41 Zavagno, *Cyprus*, 163.

42 Zavagno, *Cyprus*, 155–75.

43 Hendy, *Byzantine Monetary Economy*, 174.

44 McCormick, *Origins*, 71; Avramea, "Land and Sea Communications."

or overland to Theodosiopolis (Erzurum). From Caesarea the main route to Syria led through the Taurus and thence through the Amanus range to the environs of Antioch (Arabic: *Anṭākīyyah*). In the Taurus passes, the Byzantines maintained a number of frontier forces, and these faced the *thugur*, the Muslim forts along the frontier. These fortresses were likely meeting points between the two sides in peace and war.⁴⁵ Along the eastern land interface of the empires, though, contact seems to have been limited. As McCormick notes, the movement of the last outbreak of plague (see below) in the 740s seems to have taken some time to spread from the caliphate to Constantinople, and when it did spread to Roman lands, it did so through the sea lanes, via North Africa and Sicily to southern Italy and Hellas.⁴⁶ The route of the Radanite merchants from Pelusium to Constantinople by sea, not overland from the Gulf and Mesopotamia, seems to further indicate that the land route across Asia Minor was not always a viable one for traders. Was there no serious regular overland travel between the heartland of the empire in Anatolia and the lands of the caliphate in Upper Mesopotamia and Syria?

The large-scale movement of people across the Byzantine–Islamic frontier in the Early Middle Ages is attested on two occasions. Since warfare between the two powers was a regular occurrence, the powers established by no later than the mid eighth century some mechanisms to swap captives. The Byzantine chronicler Theophanes places the first such transaction in the year 760, while the Muslim historian al-Masʿūdī mentions another such trade occurring in 797.⁴⁷ The scale of the eighth-century transfers of captives is unknown, but handovers of prisoners in 805 and 808 are said to have involved 3,700 and 2,500 prisoners respectively.⁴⁸ Though our sources are sparse, it seems that prisoner exchanges were a regular fixture of the ninth-century East Roman and ʿAbbāsīd borderlands; more than thirteen are attested.⁴⁹ Other movements of people across the frontiers are known as well, including the settling of Mardaites from Syria in imperial territory, notably Pamphylia. The Mardaites were Syrian Christians of unknown theological adherence recruited by the Byzantines to wage war against the Muslims along the Levantine coast. At the end of the seventh and into the eighth century, thousands of these Christian mountaineers were removed from the caliphate by the Byzantines and settled in imperial territory, others fled under pressure from the Umayyad authorities.⁵⁰

In the sixth century, we hear of a number of Byzantine diplomatic missions to the Gök Türk empire. The emperor Maurice engaged in alliance-building with the Gök Türks, as had his immediate predecessors Tiberius II (r. 574–582 CE) and Justin II (r. 565–574 CE), dispatching an embassy at the start of his reign.⁵¹ One of the primary interests the Türks had in relations with the empire was the direct exchange of silk, as Byzantium

45 Cooper and Decker, *Byzantine Cappadocia*, 246.

46 McCormick, *Origins*, 504.

47 al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb at-Tanbih*, 189; al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, 257.

48 al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb at-Tanbih*, 190; Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, 95.

49 Planhol and Huart, “Lamas-Şū.”

50 Canard, “Djarādjima.”

51 Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia*, 91.

was the largest consumer of this cloth.⁵² In 598, the Türk qaghan Yung-yu-lu described himself to Maurice as “lord of the seven races, master of the seven climes,” while his successor T’ungyabghu (r. 619–630 CE) allied with the emperor Heraclius against the Persians.⁵³

Diplomatic missions in the eighth century were undertaken by the Byzantines to the Bulgars, the Franks, and the caliphate. None are well documented. Byzantine emperors continued to court powers in the south Eurasian steppe and in Central Asia. In the early part of the eighth century, the emperor Justinian II (r. 705–711) dispatched the future Leo III to the eastern shore of the Black Sea to the Alans to rouse them against the Abkhazians, who were tributaries to the Muslims.⁵⁴ The mission of Daniel of Sinope, dispatched to the Umayyad court in 713 by the emperor Anastasius II (r. 713–715) is described as an intelligence-gathering mission under the guise of a peace negotiation.⁵⁵ Contact with the caliphate must have been rather regular, as the Byzantines frequently paid tribute to the Umayyads or attempted to forestall or negotiate an end to hostilities. While Kennedy notes the paucity of documented contacts, especially following the siege of 717–718, proffering the shift from Greek to Arabic in administration and the upheavals of the Muslim civil wars as possible reasons, the most compelling explanation offered is the underreporting of diplomacy in the sources, as such contacts may have involved the caliph only infrequently.⁵⁶ Since Byzantine historians of the Early Middle Ages are not entirely well informed nor varied in their source materials, it seems possible, even probable, that many missions went unreported. The example of al-Walid’s purchase of gifts for the emperor Leo noted below supports this view; the gifts may in fact have been as part of the exchange involving Daniel of Sinope which ultimately led up to the war of 717–718. More remarkable than Byzantine dealings with the neighbouring caliphate was the Byzantine delegation sent to China by Leo III (r. 717–741) which announced his victory of the Muslim army at the walls of Constantinople. The embassy passed through Tokharistan in Bactria in 719 and left a mark on the local ruler, who adopted the name Fromo Kesaro (“emperor of Rome”), perhaps because he entered manhood in the year of the embassy.⁵⁷ This was apparently one of several embassies sent by the Byzantines to the Chinese, who referred to Byzantium as *Fu-lin*, over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries.⁵⁸ In addition to the mission of 719, the *Xin Tangshu* (compiled 1044–1060) records Byzantine embassies to China in 666–668 and 701.⁵⁹

While ninth-century embassies to China do not appear in sources known to me, the empire maintained diplomatic relations with nearer neighbours. In 838–839,

52 Sinor and Klyashtorny, “The Türk Empire.”

53 Sinor and Klyashtorny, “The Türk Empire,” 329.

54 Theophanes, *Chronicon*, 542.

55 Theophanes, *Chronicon*, 534; Nikephoros, *Breviarum*, 117.

56 Kennedy, “Antioch,” 137.

57 Harmatta and Litvinsky, “Tokharistan and Gandhara.”

58 Henry Yule, *Cathay*, IV: 8; Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 730.

59 Hirth, *China and the Roman Orient*, 60.

the Rus sent an embassy to Constantinople, an event so commonplace no contemporary Byzantine source records it but rather a western Latin account.⁶⁰ In 839, with the Rus moving into the lands around the Black Sea, the emperor Theophilus (829–842) entertained a mission from the Khazar qaghanate of the western Eurasian steppes; the Khazars asked for a Byzantine military alliance against the Rus.⁶¹

Similarly, the empire frequently communicated with the papacy. Maurice, for example, exchanged considerable correspondence with Pope Gregory I, especially over disputes arising from the mishandling (from Gregory's point of view) of the trial in Constantinople of two men accused of heresy: Athanasius, a priest and monk from Isauria, and John, a priest from Chalcedon, both of whom appealed to Gregory following their trial.⁶² There was regular exchange of documents related to church governance, and the bishop of Rome frequently sent missions to Constantinople. The Byzantines were seen to rule Italy with a heavy hand; after the Lateran Council in Rome, held in 649, both the Byzantine monk and theologian Maximus the Confessor and Pope Martin I (649–655) were arrested and taken to Constantinople.⁶³ These higher-level communications required travel, of course, of couriers, soldiers, and representatives, to hammer out the details or impose the will of the emperor. More banal travel involved the management of the estates of the church, which could still be far-flung in the eighth century, and the official correspondence of the church, which included some contact with the old patriarchs in the east now under Islamic rule or the circulation of theological treatises.⁶⁴

As recently as a decade ago, the "Dark Ages," centred on the eighth century, remained dark indeed.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, new efforts and new perspectives are gradually enhancing our body of knowledge. In the Early Middle Ages, the caliphate comprised the single largest economy west of China, and the Byzantines interacted economically, especially with the inhabitants of the Levant, which maintained large Greek-speaking communities and was majority Christian. Much of this exchange is known from texts and difficult to track in the archaeological record, and none of this is perfectly known. As the reconfiguration of the world economy engendered by Islam was still incomplete and the empire was experiencing economic duress, trade, of course, continued, though certainly not at the level of the sixth-century peak. Elite objects, such as ivory, textile, and other sumptuous objects of reciprocal gift-giving, as well as a trade in relics and slaves, have begun to gain recognition as important items of early medieval political and social exchange. Imitation and local production of Byzantine goods on Sicily, for example, are wonderful markers of the flow of ideas. Similarly, series of so-called "Coptic" metal vessels were made somewhere in Italy or in the eastern Mediterranean, or possibly both.⁶⁶

60 Treadgold, "Three Byzantine Provinces," 132.

61 Treadgold, "Three Byzantine Provinces," 143.

62 Demacopoulos, "Gregory the Great."

63 Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome*, 82–113.

64 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 480–90.

65 Decker, *Hateful Earth*.

66 Decker, *Hateful Earth*, 74–76.

The presence of Syrian cloth merchants, probably dealing in linen and silks, are attested in *The Book of the Eparch*, compiled in 912, but reflecting some earlier practices as well. These Syrian merchants congregated around the old forum of Constantine and indicate a regular traffic between the caliphate and the empire.⁶⁷ Eastern exotics and luxuries certainly remained in some demand; the caliph al-Walīd (r. 705–715) ordered his tax director in Egypt, Usāma b. Zaid al-Tanūkhī, to purchase pepper in the amount of 20,000 dinars, which the caliph intended to gift to the Roman emperor.⁶⁸ Luxury items moved in small quantities, passing through the hands of imperial elites on both sides of the frontier. East Roman luxuries conspicuously consumed within the Dār al-Islām included trained slave girls, eunuchs, and other specialist slaves. Ibn Butlan (d. 1064) noted that Byzantine girls had straight blond hair, blue eyes, and were amiable and obedient.⁶⁹ Falcons and other hunting birds from Byzantium were especially prized. More prosaic items, as the jugs and casseroles of Levantine manufacture found in excavations at Limyra in southern Asia Minor, and similar ceramic and numismatic finds on Cyprus, southern Asia Minor, and the Levant indicate the persistence to some degree, at least, of the trade in everyday objects.⁷⁰ We now know that red fineware pottery production at the tail end of the late Roman red-ware tradition continued on along the coast of Pamphylia, while similar products were also available elsewhere on Cyprus and in the Aegean into, it seems, well into the eighth century.⁷¹ We can suddenly fill whole networks, some of them quite revealing, and the durability of islands in the midst of sea routes can be seen in production sites and transport nodes of globular transport amphorae of the seventh through ninth centuries.⁷²

Microbial Exchange

Infectious disease may also serve as a proxy for communication, transmitted as it is by one human or animal host to another. Of all the illnesses that wracked the world of western Eurasia during the Early Middle Ages, the most famous is bubonic plague (*Yersinia pestis*). If we accept that the plague pandemic of the second century was smallpox, as do many, then the first worldwide outbreak of the bubonic plague is the so-called Justinianic Plague of 541–750 (see also Chapter 18), which originated in China and reached the empire through Egypt. We now have firm evidence linking plague to the sixth-century population relatively near the Byzantine world through DNA reconstruction of relict *Yersinia pestis* extracted from the teeth of multiple individuals inhumated in southern Germany.⁷³ While historians tend to view each reported outbreak of the plague

67 Mango, “Commercial Map.”

68 Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations.”

69 Caswell, *Slave Girls*, 16.

70 Vroom, “Limyra in Lycia”; Randall, “Continuity and Change.”

71 Jackson et al., “Primary Evidence.”

72 Gelichi et al., “Comacchio.”

73 Wagner et al., “*Yersinia Pestis*”; Feldman et al., “High-Coverage *Yersinia Pestis*.”

as discrete phenomena, the scientific approach is to group these rather chronologically tight epidemics as waves, since incidence of the disease oscillated in accordance with a number of factors, including density of human and animal hosts and other environmental conditions.

The last great pulse of the Justinianic Plague was felt in 749, though the origins and precise timing of this outbreak are difficult to pinpoint. At the end of the seventh century, bubonic plague struck both the empire and caliphate, visiting Constantinople in the late spring and summer months and then smiting Syria in the summer of 699. More pestilence ushered in the eighth century. A particularly severe episode of plague occurred in 704–705 and killed many, as recorded in the Syrian common source (Theophilus of Edessa) via the *Zuqnin Chronicle* and the chronicler Michael the Syrian (1126–1199); the former reported that the dead outnumbered the living, while Michael noted that one-third of the population perished.⁷⁴ Other outbreaks, more limited in scope, followed in Crete, in Syria in 713, in Egypt in 714–715, and in Constantinople in 718. This latter epidemic coincided with the massive Arab siege of the imperial capital. Those soldiers, sailors, and camp followers who had besieged the city may have carried the plague with them on their return home to Syria and Iraq, where, in 718–719 there was another epidemic. In 725–726, *Yersinia pestis* visited Syria and Mesopotamia, and again in 732–735. The latter outbreak possibly spread to Asia Minor with the invasion of Suleiman into southern Cappadocia, where the Muslims suffered serious defections and defeat at the hands of the empire in addition to the ravages of disease. At mid century, the final occurrence of the Justinianic Plague occurred. The outbreak is recorded first in Egypt and North Africa in 743–744; Syria and Iraq in 744–745; Sicily, Rome, Greece, and the Aegean Islands in 745–746; Constantinople in 747–748, and again in Syria and Iraq in 748–750. This episode was particularly severe with thousands of victims. The *Zuqnin Chronicle*, a contemporary account written in northern Syria, describes the 744–745 pestilence with borrowed elements from the sixth-century plague account of the Syriac writer John of Ephesus, but such *mimesis* should lead us to underscore, rather than downplay, the severity of this ultimate visitation, which is said to have killed hundreds of thousands in Upper and Lower Mesopotamia.⁷⁵

The effects of the plague in Byzantium were acute. As an act of God, the plague was a ready-made weapon in the hands of those who opposed the official state theology of iconoclasm. Such anti-imperial rhetoric and the unrest it engendered likely led to the strong reaction of the emperor Constantine V (741–775), whom the surviving sources, all hostile, depict as a relentless persecutor of the iconophile church.⁷⁶ The emperor's acts were at least in part prompted by the crisis triggered by this especially severe visitation of the disease and the resulting pall it cast over his reign. Beyond the psychological damage done to the inhabitants of the empire, there was the severe demographic crisis

74 *The Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 149; Michael the Syrian, *Chronicon*, 480; Conrad, *Plague*, 275–78; Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence*, 364–79.

75 Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence*, 379–86.

76 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 20.

the disease caused, which forced the emperor to transfer thousands from surrounding regions to repopulate the capital.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Historians today see the three centuries from 600 to 900 as a time of turmoil and defeat, with years after 800 marking the beginning of the “Byzantine revival,” but many of the developments that restored the empire to political and economic prominence in Eurasia began in the eighth century.⁷⁸ Old Roman approaches to diplomacy had not changed; despite its failures, the empire never isolated itself nor viewed itself as anything but a major power in world affairs. While trade networks altered and new trade agents emerged, some nodes remained durable, especially south Italy and Sicily, which were monetized at a considerably greater level than most of the state.⁷⁹ Even if the eighth century saw the fortunes of the capital dented by war, a poor economy, and disease, Constantinople remained an imperial seat and a destination of trade and exchange.

While the opening decades of the eighth century were times of severe crisis and depression and were undoubtedly the most challenging in imperial history, the empire gradually recovered from the shock of military defeat, the loss of its most populous possessions in the Levant, and the challenge of a new monotheism, which sparked a crisis in confidence among the religious and political leadership of the empire. One response, in the form of iconoclasm, was perhaps inspired in part by currents within Islam but also had much deeper roots in Jewish communities and Christian sects within and without imperial borders. While contemporary commentators painted the period of the iconoclast emperors as wicked in the extreme, accompanied by all the evils one might expect, economic and political realities tell a different tale. At the provincial capital of Amorium, one of the few excavated urban centres of the age, one finds evidence for a monetized economy and urban continuity that decades ago few academics would have expected.⁸⁰

Throughout the centuries under investigation, the fate of Byzantium hinged upon the natural environment. The Justinianic Plague, which began in 542 and continued to afflict the empire sporadically until 750 (on this, see Chapter 18) is both hotly debated and likely to have shaped the demographic, and hence the social and economic, fate of the empire as well. Other environmentally induced traumas, such as the powerful—though little studied—eruption of Santorini in 726, eroded the faith of the population and reinforced the notion that God was angry with the empire. The lack of public optimism and prolonged demographic decline that began in 542 most likely lasted throughout much of the following century, though we lack a precise view of the broader impacts, and

77 Turner, “Politics of Despair.”

78 Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*.

79 Morrisson, “Byzantine Money.”

80 Lightfoot, “Trade and Industry.”

no attempts have yet been made to quantify the scope and scale of change in the empire. Certainly, the empire of the seventh and early eighth centuries was much smaller and poorer than its pan-Mediterranean predecessor governed by Justinian.

In terms of imperial leadership and signs of a revival, of undoubted significance is the reign of Constantine V, whose time in power ended only with his death in 775, a remarkable span that stretched from his time as the child co-emperor alongside his father Leo III in 720. It is rarely considered that only Justinian I (r. 517–565) and Constantine VII (r. 908–959) could rival this length of co- or full rulership. Historians have typically adopted the iconodule perspective that emphasized the internal discord and external failures of the reign.⁸¹ The full flowering of medieval Byzantine culture is visible only in the successive centuries during the government of the Macedonian dynasty (867–1056). During the first century of the period under consideration here, the Byzantine empire endured significant trauma, including the double blow of more than twenty years of war with Persia and then a prolonged conflict with the armies of the Muslim conquest, wars that cast doubt on the survival of the state. Climatic conditions worsened, probably in response to these and other factors, but by the end of the eighth century, when the foundations for the restoration of imperial fortunes had already been laid, Byzantium returned to prominence in the political and cultural life of western Eurasia.

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81 Rochow et al., *Kaiser Konstantin V*, 155ff.

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Chapter 12

NORTHEAST AFRICA

George Hatke

Introduction

For millennia, Northeast Africa has linked sub-Saharan Africa with the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. Towards the end of the first millennium BCE, more distant lands bordering the western Indian Ocean were also incorporated into this network of commercial and cultural interaction. Although Egypt's role in this network is by far the best documented of any region in Northeast Africa, the lands of Nubia and Ethiopia to the south were also involved. Both have shaped, and have been shaped by, historical trends in and around Northeast Africa, though often in very different ways. The Early Middle Ages constitute an important era in the history of Egypt's southern neighbours, for it witnessed such developments as the spread of Christianity, the expansion of the early Islamic empire (with all the challenges that implied), and the decline and fall of some polities together with the rise of others. On the whole, Nubia fared better than Ethiopia during this period, though this impression might owe something to the fact that there is more written documentation for Nubia at this time. Although there is good evidence that the Early Middle Ages witnessed a revival of Nubian culture, it will be argued in this chapter that there are hints of important cultural activity in Ethiopia at about the same time, even if the political history of Ethiopia during this period remains largely obscure.

Geographical and Linguistic Background

The two regions with which this chapter is concerned differ considerably in their topography, ecology, and climate. Nubia, stretching southwards from Aswān into northern Sudan, is centred on the Nile river, which in this region is interrupted by no fewer than six cataracts, rapids caused by rocky outcrops that hinder navigation and in some instances force those travelling via the Nile to disembark and proceed overland to the next stretch of navigable water. As with Egypt to the north—and, indeed, Ethiopia to the southeast—agriculture has historically been the mainstay of the Nubian economy, aided by such devices as the *shādūf* (a counterweighted tool for lifting water) and the *sāqiya* (an ox-driven waterwheel). Such technology is particularly vital to the agricultural economy in Lower (i.e. northern) Nubia, a region which is virtually rainless. Yet even with the aid of these devices, the agricultural output of Nubia has always been lower than that of Egypt, given that the Nile Valley floodplain is usually narrower in the former region, with the result that Nubia's population has been correspondingly smaller in size and lower in density. Although the First Cataract forms an obvious northern boundary

of Nubia, while the deserts flanking the Nile Valley form boundaries to the east and west, the southern boundary of Nubia is rather nebulous. The geographical distribution of Nubian, a subdivision of the East Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan language family, provides one way of defining Nubia. Today, Nile Nubian is spoken only north of the Fourth Cataract, though this is the result of the Arabization of northern Sudan, which only began in the late Middle Ages. By the twentieth century, the town of al-Dabba came to mark the southern frontier of Nubia.¹ Since, however, Nubian toponyms are found as far south as the Khartoum area,² Nubian would appear to have once been far more widespread than today, in which case a broader conception of what constitutes Nubia seems appropriate. For the purposes of this chapter, Nubia shall designate the entire Middle Nile Valley from the First Cataract to the northern Jazīra (i.e. the land between the White and Blue Niles). Lower Nubia, located between the First and Second Cataracts, is particularly well documented on account of the rescue excavations undertaken there during the building of the Aswān High Dam in the 1960s. More recently, medieval settlements to the south, including Old Dongola and Soba, both of them capitals of Christian kingdoms, have been excavated. During the Middle Ages, Arabic authors designated the indigenous inhabitants of this region as *al-Nūba*, a name derived from *Nob*, a term originally applied to a group that had infiltrated the Middle Nile Valley from the west during Antiquity, which is attested in Gəʿəz in the form *Nōbā*.³ A related term in Greek, *Nobatai* (alternatively *Nobadēs*), refers to what seems to have been an offshoot of this group that settled in Lower Nubia and gave its name to the kingdom of Nobatia (see [Map 11](#)).⁴

Ethiopia, with which the other part of this chapter is concerned, designates for our purposes not only the modern nation by that name but also its Eritrean neighbour. Like Nubia, the northern Ethiopian highlands on which our discussion of Ethiopia focuses have historically depended on an agricultural economy, the difference being that here agriculture relies on precipitation caused by the Indian Ocean monsoons rather than on watercourses like the Nile. In cases of rugged terrain—never an issue in Nubia—Ethiopian farmers have shaped hillsides into terraces to create level fields and prevent erosion through runoff. In medieval Arabic sources, Ethiopians are referred to as *al-Ḥabasha*, a term attested in pre-Islamic South Arabian inscriptions in the forms ʿḥbs²ⁿ (ʿAḥbūsh^{ān}), ḥbs²ⁿ (Ḥabash^{ān}), and ḥbs²ⁿ (Ḥabashat^{ān}).⁵ In terms of language, Semitic

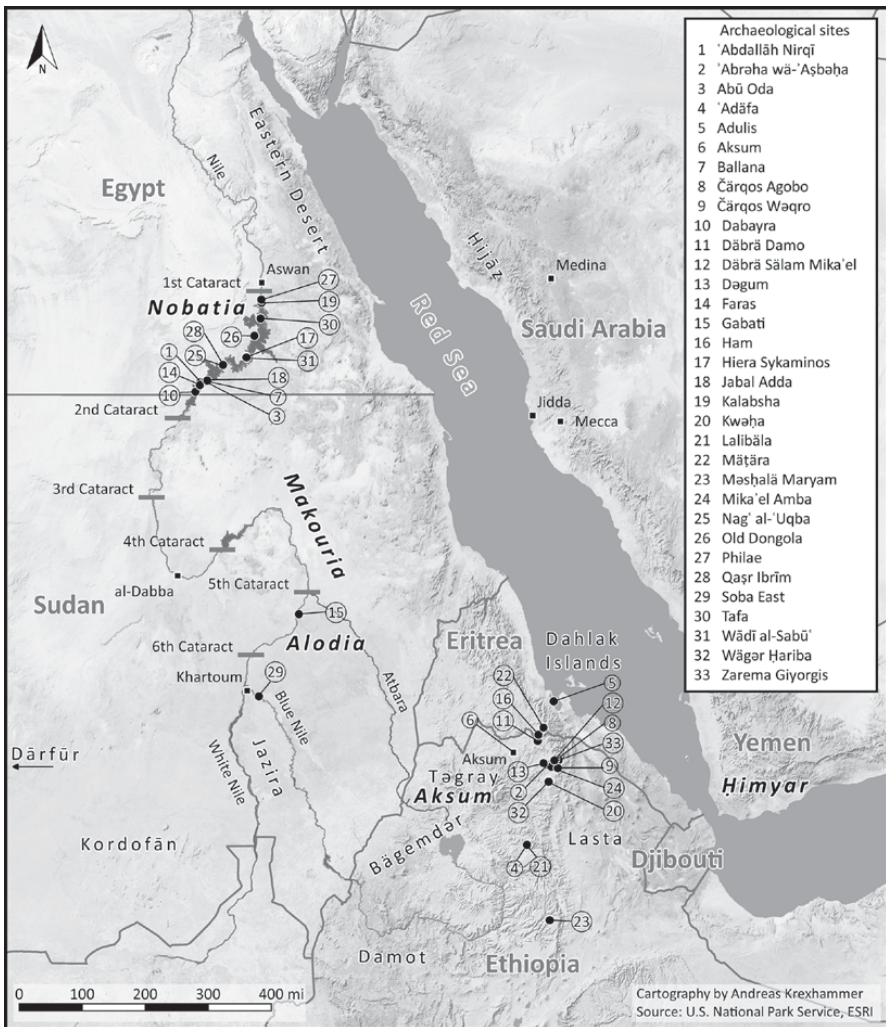
1 Shinnie, “Medieval Nubia.” This applies to Nile Valley Nubian rather than to other languages of the Nubian group spoken in Kordofān and Dārūr. On the latter, see below.

2 Haycock, “Medieval Nubia,” 18.

3 Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 82–86, 95, 97–122, 131–32, 134, 150, 155. On the usage of the term *Nob* in Meroitic, see Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 98n416.

4 Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 156–60.

5 Müller, “Abessinier.” In one instance, the eighth-century Coptic chronicler John the Deacon implicitly identifies the Nubians as *al-Ḥabasha*, by referring to the Nubian king Kyriakos as “the orthodox Ethiopian king of Makouria” (*malik al-Maqurra al-Ḥabashī l-urthudhukṣī*) (quoted in Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 85n27). This reflects a broader usage of the term *Ḥabasha* among some medieval Arabic authors, who applied the term to black Africans as a whole.



Map 11. Important early medieval sites in northeast Africa.

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and Cushitic, both branches of Afroasiatic, have historically dominated the northern highlands of Ethiopia. Like Nubian, Cushitic has retreated in the face of Semitic, the latter represented in northern Ethiopia by such languages as Gə'əz (now extinct as a spoken language), Tigrinya, and Tigre. Other languages of the Ethiosemitic group, such as Amharic, Harari, and the Gurage languages, are attested in more southerly regions and are beyond the scope of this chapter. It is important to recognize that, although both Nubia and Ethiopia have long been affected by the spread of Semitic languages, the history of this process is very different in these two regions. Ethiosemitic languages are

descended from a now extinct Semitic tongue which was introduced to the northern Horn of Africa from South Arabia during Antiquity, perhaps as early as the Bronze Age.⁶ In Nubia, by contrast, Semitic is represented solely by Arabic, which was not introduced until the Islamic period, and there is reason to believe that, even in the now more heavily Arabized southern regions of Nubia, Arabic did not become the dominant language until 300 or even 200 years ago.⁷

North of the Ethiopian highlands and east of Nubia, the Eastern Desert occupies the entire region between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea. Largely unfit for agriculture, this region has for millennia been inhabited by Cushitic-speaking pastoralists who have periodically raided the sedentary communities of both the Middle Nile Valley and the northern Ethiopian highlands. Such raiding was greatly facilitated by the adoption of the camel by these pastoralists, most probably during the late first millennium BCE.⁸ The indigenous peoples of the Eastern Desert have been known by a variety of names throughout history, most notably *Md3yw* in Egyptian, *Blemmyes* in Greek and Latin, *Baġā* in Gəʿəz, and *Bujā* in Arabic, the last two names giving rise to the name Beja, by which the indigenous inhabitants of the region are known today. Although it has been argued that such terms obscure a certain degree of ethnic diversity in the Eastern Desert,⁹ fragmentary samples of the Blemmyan language, usually in the form of personal names, indicate that it was a form of old Beja.¹⁰ Thus, “Beja” can be retained as an apt designation for the indigenous inhabitants of the Eastern Desert, with the caveat that they have not always self-identified as such. Despite its lack of agricultural potential, the Eastern Desert has long attracted the attention of the outside world on account of its gold mines. The lack of a substantial agricultural base for the economy did, however, hinder the development of state society of the sort evidenced in Nubia since the third millennium BCE and in northern Ethiopia since the early first millennium BCE. Even the so-called kingdoms of the Beja described by medieval Arabic authors are more likely to have been chiefdoms rather than complex state societies like those of Nubia and Ethiopia.

Although there is archaeological evidence for contact between Nubia and Ethiopia during the Bronze Age,¹¹ the Eastern Desert that lies between them, though not an insurmountable barrier, has historically had a divisive effect. In addition, Nubia and Ethiopia were influenced by divergent economic interests. In general, commercial contact between the Middle Nile and the Ethiopian highlands seems to have offered less for either region than contact with larger-scale economies. Thus, while Nubia benefited most from the Nile Valley route linking it to Egypt and thence the Mediterranean, Ethiopia looked more

6 Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 18–19.

7 Spaulding, “Old Shaiqi Language.”

8 Although the camel’s presence in Nubia is first attested in the form of a camel coprolite from Qaṣr Ibrīm, dating from 920–800 BCE (Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 127–28), it is likely that the Beja first acquired camels from the Arab tribes who settled in the Eastern Desert in Graeco-Roman times.

9 Barnard, “Blemmyes.”

10 Satzinger, “Some More Remarks.”

11 Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 15–17.

to the Red Sea, which provided direct links to Arabia and the Indian Ocean world beyond, in addition to providing a maritime route to Egypt which was quicker and safer than the overland route through the Eastern Desert.¹² Consequently, Nubia and Ethiopia appear to have interacted more often with regions located further afield than they did with each other.¹³ This observation is broadly applicable to the Middle Ages. Apart from transient Nubian involvement in Ethiopian ecclesiastical affairs around the end of the tenth century, possible Nubian influence on certain aspects of medieval Ethiopian iconography, and the occasional passage of travellers from one region to the other,¹⁴ there is surprisingly little documented contact between medieval Nubia and Ethiopia, despite their relative proximity and shared Christian heritage. Since, however, Christianity is arguably the most important commonality between Nubia and Ethiopia during the Middle Ages, a closer examination of the introduction of this religion to both regions is in order.

A Common Faith: Christianity in Ethiopia and Nubia

Although Christianity was the official religion of northern Ethiopia and Nubia throughout the Middle Ages, the processes by which it was introduced to, and diffused within, these two regions differ considerably. While much further removed geographically than their Nubian counterparts from the early Christian communities of Egypt, the ruling elites of the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum were the first to adopt Christianity.¹⁵ The introduction of Christianity to Aksum is attributed by the ecclesiastical historian Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 410 CE) to a Syrian named Frumentius,¹⁶ who, together with his companion Aedesius, had been taken prisoner off the Ethiopian coast. Having risen through the ranks at the royal court, Frumentius converted the ruling elite to Christianity and was at length appointed bishop of Aksum by the ecclesiastical authorities at Alexandria. Although Rufinus mentions no Aksumite ruler by name, a letter sent by the Roman emperor Constantius II (r. 337–361 CE) to Aksum addresses two royal brothers by name as Aizanas and Sazanas and urges them to reject Frumentius as bishop and send him back to Alexandria for doctrinal reinstruction.¹⁷ The brothers are readily identifiable with the Aksumite king ʿĒzānā (r. ca. 330–370 CE) and his brother Šēʿēzānā. Significantly,

12 Arguments for direct trade between Nubia and India in the early first millennium CE (Haaland, “Iron Working”) lack hard evidence and are based largely on vague and, at times, anachronistic analogies between Nubian and Indian iconography. For a critical review of theories regarding Nubian–Indian ties, see Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 28–29n96. Hard evidence for such ties during the Middle Ages is similarly lacking.

13 Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, passim. It should be stressed, however, that these more remote regions generally lay outside sub-Saharan Africa. There is no evidence, for example, of Ethiopian contact with the Swahili coast, for example. In the case of Nubia, Arabic sources hint at contact with peoples to the south and west of the Middle Nile Valley, though it is not clear how extensive this contact was.

14 Zibelius-Chen and Fiaccadori, “Nubia,” 468–69.

15 Aksum is the name of both the kingdom and its capital.

16 Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Ecclesiastica* §10.9–10.

17 Athanasius, *Apologia ad Constantium* §31.13–17.

it is during the reign of ʿĒzānā that we find the earliest Christian references in Aksumite inscriptions, be they invocations of a “Lord of Heaven” (ʿagzīʿa samāy) in Gəʿəz¹⁸ or of the Trinity in Greek.¹⁹ Finally, Aksumite coins, minted since the end of third century, testify to a religious transformation during the mid-fourth century in that those which were struck during the earlier part of ʿĒzānā’s reign still display the pagan symbols of the full moon and crescent, while coins from the latter part of his reign bear the Cross.²⁰ The Christianization of Ethiopian society at large was a long, slow process. Even at the core of the Aksumite state, archaeological evidence indicates that Christianity did not gain widespread adherence until the late fifth and early sixth centuries.²¹ Likewise, it is only during the sixth century that we find the first explicitly Christian, as well as Old Testament, references in royal Gəʿəz inscriptions,²² as well as the first illuminated manuscripts.²³

Political events in the sixth century might have accelerated the process of Christianization. Thus, while records of ʿĒzānā’s invasion of Nubia, conducted in 360 CE, sometime after that king’s conversion to Christianity, invoke the aid of God and Christ, there is no indication of an attempt to convert the Nubians.²⁴ Quite different in their ideological tone are the records of Aksumite military intervention in South Arabia during the sixth century. At that time, the Aksumite king Kālēb (r. ca. 510–540 CE) invaded the south Arabian kingdom of Ḥimyar, first in 518 and again in 525, and brought to power local Christian noblemen whom he charged with the task of ruling South Arabia as proxies of Aksum.²⁵ To be sure, there were strategic interests involved, not least given that, by controlling both sides of the Bāb al-Mandab, Aksum could control the traffic flowing into and out of the Red Sea. At the same time, Aksumite intervention had strong religious undertones, for it was as a response to Jewish Ḥimyarite aggressions against the local Christians that the Aksumites presented their invasions of South Arabia to the outside world. Sixth-century Gəʿəz inscriptions from both Yemen and Ethiopia, containing as

18 RIÉth 189/5+40–41+45+49+52 (Drewes and Schneider, “Les Inscriptions,” 263, 264, 265). Variants of this epithet include “Lord of Heaven, [Who is in] Heaven and (on) Earth” (ʿagzīʿa samāy [za-ba]-samāy wa-mədr) (RIÉth 189/1), “Lord of All” (ʿagzīʿa kʷəllū) (RIÉth 189/5+7), and “Lord of the Land” (ʿagzīʿa bəḥēr) (RIÉth 189/14–15+33–34 [Drewes and Schneider, “Les Inscriptions,” 263, 264]).

19 RIÉth 271/1–4 (Bernand, “Les Inscriptions,” 371).

20 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 97.

21 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 97.

22 For an extended discussion, see Hatke, *Africans in Arabia Felix*, 355–84; cf. Piovaneli, “Apocryphal Legitimation,” 22–24.

23 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 102.

24 Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 110–11. On the religious invocations, see RIÉth 271/1–5, 10–22 (Bernand, “Les Inscriptions,” 371); RIÉth 189/14–15 (Drewes and Schneider, “Les Inscriptions,” 263). For full translations of both inscriptions, with commentary, see Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*.

25 For the history of Aksumite intervention in South Arabia during the early sixth century, see Hatke, *Africans in Arabia Felix*.

they do Christian and Old Testament references, reflect Aksum's more assertive religious identity and cast the Ethiopian kingdom in the role of something like a new (Christian) Israel.²⁶ Although this fusion of Christian and Old Testament ideology was to have an indelible effect on medieval Ethiopia,²⁷ Aksumite rule in South Arabia was not to last for long. It was brought to an end sometime between 531 and 540 through a revolt by an erstwhile general—and a Christian, no less—in the Aksumite army which had invaded South Arabia in 525: a former slave by the name of 'Abrəhā,²⁸ who seized power as a king of Ḥimyar and cast off his allegiance to Aksum. The regime established by 'Abrəhā endured under his sons Yaksūm and Masrūq until ca. 570, when it was overthrown by the Sasanians of Iran.²⁹ Although Aksum maintained diplomatic relations with 'Abrəhā's Ḥimyar,³⁰ and although Aksumite kings continued to claim dominion over Ḥimyar,³¹ Aksum gradually retreated from world affairs. Archaeological evidence indicates that the kingdom fell into decline after the mid-sixth century, due in no small part to the ecological degradation of the northern Ethiopian highlands.³²

At about the time that Christian Aksum lost control of South Arabia, the Nubian elites were just beginning to adopt Christianity. Political instability in earlier centuries might have hindered any significant spread of Christianity to Nubia. In the fourth century, the kingdom of Kush, which had dominated the Middle Nile Valley for over a millennium, fell into decline and collapsed. Thereafter, Lower Nubia became a war zone dominated by the Nobatai and Blemmyes, who at times vied for control of the region and on other occasions joined forces against the Romans then occupying Egypt.³³ Ultimately, the Nobatai, who were generally the more willing of the two to cooperate with the Romans,³⁴ gained the upper hand in Lower Nubia and by the sixth century established Faras as the political centre of their kingdom.³⁵ Their kingdom of Nobatia extended from the First Cataract to the Third, while to the south a very different cultural tradition prevailed, indicative of a distinct polity.³⁶ Although the process of state development in this more southerly region of Nubia remains obscure owing to the lack of written material from

26 Hatke, *Africans in Arabia Felix*, 276–77, 343–44, 351, 382–84.

27 Rodinson, "Sur la question"; Piovanelli, "Apocryphal Legitimation."

28 On 'Abrəhā's origins, see Procopius, *De Bellis*, §1.4–5.

29 Potts, "Sasanian Relationship," 206–9.

30 Thus CIH 541, a Sabaic inscription from Mārib, records 'Abrəhā's reception of a diplomatic mission from the *nagāsi*, i.e. the king of Aksum (CIH 541/88 [Müller, "Abessinier," 115]).

31 As documented in RIÉth 192, a Gə'əz inscription written in the consonantal *musnad* script of South Arabia and erected by Kālēb's son and successor Wā'zēb (r. ca. 540–560) at Aksum (RIÉth 192/5–7 [Drewes and Schneider, "Les Inscriptions," 275]).

32 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 209.

33 Christides, "Nubia and Egypt," 341–42 (and the literature cited therein); Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 16–20.

34 Christides, "Nubia and Egypt," 342; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 41.

35 Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 28, 41.

36 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 22–23, 24–30; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 41–45.

the period following the collapse of Kush, chronicles from the Mediterranean world indicate that two other kingdoms had emerged there by the mid-sixth century: Makouria to the immediate south of Nobatia and Alodia to the south, in turn, of Makouria. While the boundaries of Nobatia are relatively clear, those of Makouria and Alodia are rather less so, though it is likely that the frontier between the latter two kingdoms lay somewhere between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts.³⁷ More uncertain still is how far south Alodia extended, though it is likely that much of the northern Jazīra lay within Alodia's sphere of influence. The capitals of Makouria and Alodia were established at Old Dongola and Soba East respectively.

The Syriac ecclesiastical historian John of Ephesus (d. ca. 588 CE) attributes the official adoption of Christianity by the Nubians to the influence of the missionaries Julian and Longinus. According to John, two missions were sent from Constantinople ca. 543, the one dispatched by the Byzantine emperor Justinian (r. 527–565 CE) representing the Melkite or Diophysite persuasion, the other, sent by Justinian's wife Theodora, belonging to the Miaphysite camp.³⁸ The doctrinal distinction between these two parties concerned the nature of Christ, Diophysites believing that Christ's humanity and divinity existed as two separate natures (a position held by the ruling elite of Byzantium), Miaphysites that his humanity and divinity were united in a single nature. Miaphysitism, it should be noted, is the branch of Christianity to which the Ethiopian and Egyptian churches have historically belonged. The Miaphysite mission sent by Theodora, and led by one Julian, managed to reach Nubia first and succeeded in converting many of the Nobatai.³⁹ John of Ephesus, himself a Miaphysite, is silent about the conversion of Makouria, but from the Visigothic ecclesiastical historian John of Biclar (d. post-621 CE) we learn that the Makourians had accepted Christianity by 568, and that in 573 they sent a delegation to the emperor Justin II (r. 656–574 CE), bearing gifts of elephant tusks and a giraffe as a token of their friendship with the Byzantines.⁴⁰ Their friendly advances to Byzantium would make little sense had they been Miaphysite, given that Justin II had inaugurated an anti-Miaphysite policy in 571.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Makourian adherence to the Melkite creed, which probably never extended far beyond the ruling elite, may not have outlasted the sixth century.⁴² Sometime after the Makourians accepted Christianity, Longinus, the other Miaphysite missionary responsible for evangelizing Nubia, made his

37 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 26, 28; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 44–45, 46.

38 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 32.

39 The implication in the account of John of Ephesus that Justinian and Theodora were in competition to win the Nubians over to their respective sects of Christianity is open to question (Zacharopoulou, "Justinian and Theodora").

40 John of Biclar, quoted in Brakmann, "Defunctus adhuc loquitur," 286 (n. 11).

41 See, however, Brakmann, "Defunctus adhuc loquitur," 286.

42 Whether continued Byzantine influence on Makourian art and religious terminology points to the survival of Melkite Christianity in Makouria (Zacharopoulou, "Justinian and Theodora," 79) is questionable given the strong Byzantine influence on medieval Nubian culture in general.

way to Nubatia to continue the work started by Julian. In 580, he ventured south, taking a route through the Eastern Desert out of fear of hostility from Makouria, until he reached Alodia, where he converted many of the locals to Miaphysite Christianity.

Unfortunately, no Nubian accounts of the evangelization of the Middle Nile Valley survive, though there are hints from other sources of a possible Christianizing trend before the arrival of Byzantine missionaries. Already in 362, the establishment of a bishopric at Philae on the northern frontier of Nubia might have had some impact on the local population.⁴³ Also suggestive is the presence of objects of Christian origin in Nubatian tombs at the royal cemetery at Ballana as early as the fifth century, including baptismal spoons, reliquaries, censers, and votive lamps,⁴⁴ though some such objects might have been seized as plunder during raids on Christian settlements in Egypt. More significant is the construction of tumulus tombs, a type of grave favoured in pagan times, for Christian burials, as well as the use of Christian symbols in otherwise pagan contexts, such as cross-marked pots in burials at Jabal Adda and a tomb with a carved cross at Qaşr Ibrīm.⁴⁵

As with Ethiopia, the spread of Christianity in Nubia was a long, slow process, and it must be stressed that, while foreign sources assume mass conversions of Nubians at the hand of Byzantine missionaries, the adoption of Christianity was far from universal in sixth-century Nubia. The pace of Christianization was probably slowest in Alodia, which was farther removed than either Nubatia or Makouria from the major centres of late antique and early medieval Christendom. Whatever the number of Alodian converts Longinus might have won, radiocarbon dates obtained from the three churches on Mound B at Soba East suggest that the earliest of these structures was not built before the mid-seventh century,⁴⁶ while at Gabati, to the north of the Alodian capital, pagan burial practices continued long after the official conversion of the kingdom by Longinus, the first possible Christian burials dating from no earlier than the ninth or even tenth century.⁴⁷ In more northerly areas of Nubia, some of the earliest churches were converted temples,⁴⁸ while excavations at Faras and Old Dongola indicate the foundation of mudbrick churches at both sites during the sixth century.⁴⁹

43 Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 47.

44 Edwards, "Christianisation of Nubia," 90, 91.

45 Edwards, "Christianisation of Nubia," 91, 92. That the temple built by Kushite pharaoh Taharqa (r. 690–664 BCE) at Qaşr Ibrīm was converted into a church as early as the fifth century (Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 49) is questionable on archaeological grounds (Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 36).

46 Edwards, "Christianisation of Nubia," 92.

47 Edwards, "Christianisation of Nubia," 93.

48 Godlewski, "Early Period," 285; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 35–38; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 53, 54–56.

49 Godlewski, "Early Period," 278–79, 282, 284.

A Nubian Renaissance

After the adoption of Christianity as the official state religion by the three Nubian kingdoms, the next major development in the history of medieval Nubia was armed conflict with the Muslims. Arabic sources preserve conflicting accounts of this development, but the narrative as traditionally understood by Nubiologists is that Nubia was invaded in 641/642 by the Arab military commander ‘Abd Allāh bin Sa’d bin Abī Sarḥ, but that the venture ended in an utter defeat of the Muslim forces by the Nubians.⁵⁰ Emboldened by their victory, the Nubians began raiding Upper Egypt and even for a time occupied Aswān and Philae.⁵¹ In response, Ibn Abī Sarḥ invaded Nubia again in 652, pushing as far south as the Makourian capital of Old Dongola.⁵² Once again the Muslims were defeated, this time by Nubian archers, who, on account of their ability to strike the eyes of their enemies, were christened “pupil smiters” (*rumāt al-ḥadaq*) by Arabic authors.⁵³ Admitting defeat, the Muslims agreed to a truce, referred to in Arabic sources as the *baqt*, a term derived from Greek πακτον (Latin: *pactum*), which involved the annual dispatch of some 360 slaves to Egypt in return for grain. The trouble with this narrative is that no extant contemporary source describes either these Muslim invasions of Nubia or the establishment of the *baqt*. Indeed, no Arabic source before al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) refers to a seventh-century Muslim attack on Old Dongola, and even al-Maqrīzī’s report appears dubious in light of certain anachronistic details.⁵⁴ This is not to say that there was no Muslim invasion of Nubia in the seventh century at all, only that such an invasion would have been smaller in scale than traditionally understood by Nubiologists.

In the case of the *baqt*, we are faced with a similar historiographical problem. Although the *Futūḥ Miṣr* of Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 871 CE) contains the oldest reference to the *baqt* known from literary sources,⁵⁵ it is once again al-Maqrīzī who preserves what purports to be the full text of the agreement which Ibn Abī Sarḥ had reached with the Nubians.⁵⁶ Here too the authenticity of al-Maqrīzī’s presentation of the data is highly dubious. At least a portion of his version of the truce seems to be derived from the lost *Kitāb Akhbār al-Nūba* of the tenth-century Fāṭimid envoy to Nubia, Ibn Salīm al-Aswānī.⁵⁷ Certainly, the fact that the Muslim ruler to whom the slaves were to be handed over every year is called the “Imam of the Muslims”⁵⁸ indicates a *Shī‘ī*, and therefore

50 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 68.

51 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 69.

52 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 69.

53 For example, Ibn Kḥuradādhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa’l-Mamālik*, 92a.

54 Obluski, “First Contacts,” 133–37.

55 As for documentary sources, an earlier allusion to the *baqt* is made in an Arabic papyrus dating from 758 (see below).

56 Hinds and Sakkout, “Letter,” 162. For al-Maqrīzī’s version of the text of the agreement, see al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawā‘iz*, I: 200.

57 Hinds and Sakkout, “Letter,” 162.

58 al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawā‘iz*, I: 200.

Fāṭimid, interpolation.⁵⁹ That al-Maqrīzī's version alludes to a mosque at Old Dongola also results from a later interpolation, for such a building can hardly have existed at the Makourian capital in the seventh century. In fact, it was not until 1317 that a mosque was first established there.⁶⁰ In so far as a formal agreement between the Nubians and the Muslims existed at all during the seventh century, it was probably an unwritten non-aggression pact between the two parties that involved an exchange of slaves for Egyptian commodities.⁶¹ Only later, at some point during the Umayyad period (661–750 CE), was this pact formalized, perhaps in written form, on which later textual accretions formed.⁶² According to Spaulding, the *baqt* was originally conceived as a system of exchange, the dispatch of slaves to Egypt conveying the Nubians' acceptance of the new Islamic regime as a legitimate foreign authority with which to maintain normal relations.⁶³ Diplomacy through gift-giving and economic transactions, Spaulding points out, was common in pre-modern Northeast Africa, another example being the sending of gifts to the Byzantine court by the Makourians in 573 to which mention has been made above.⁶⁴ It should be noted that the southern kingdom of Alodia, which lay well beyond the range of the Muslim invasions of the seventh century, was not bound by this agreement. It might well have been the case, however, that Alodia provided many of the slaves sent by the Nubians to Egypt as per the *baqt*, not least because the kingdom's southerly location gave it direct access to the grasslands of the southern Jazīra, Kordofān, and perhaps even Dārūr—regions inhabited by non-Christian peoples who might have been targeted in Nubian slave raids.

At some point, the kingdoms of Nobatia and Makouria were united, with Old Dongola as the capital of the entire realm. Although the rulers of Makouria were now dominant, Nobatia retained its own regional identity and was administered from Faras by a viceroy appointed by the Makourian king, known in Greek as the eparch (ἐπαρχος), in Arabic as the "Master of the Mountain" (*ṣāhib al-jabal*), and in Old Nubian as *soḥoj*. When exactly this unification was achieved is unclear, though it might have been effected by Merkurios, a king of Makouria who came to the throne in 696 and reigned until sometime between 710 and 730. The potential threat posed by the Muslims, even if they had failed to conquer Nubia, might have prompted the Nobatians and Makourians to seek strength through political unity.⁶⁵ That Merkurios' reign marks a turning point in Nubian history is evident from a report by the Egyptian chronicler John the Deacon, who, writing ca. 770, calls Merkurios a "New Constantine."⁶⁶ Unfortunately, this part of John's report, as preserved

59 Hinds and Sakkout, "Letter," 164.

60 Hinds and Sakkout, "Letter," 164.

61 Hinds and Sakkout, "Letter," 169; Obłuski, "First Contacts," 139; Ruffini, "History of Medieval Nubia."

62 Hinds and Sakkout, "Letter," 169; Obłuski, "First Contacts," 139–42.

63 Spaulding, "Fate of Alodia," 585.

64 Spaulding, "Fate of Alodia," 584–85, 587–88.

65 Godlewski, "Early Period," 291.

66 Vantini, *Oriental Sources*, 40.

by the Coptic bishop Sāwirus bin al-Muqaffa' of al-Ashmūnayn (d. after 987), is frustratingly brief and, apart from comparing Merkurios' conduct with that of the disciples of Jesus, has little of substance to say about the king's reign. That Merkurios earned his title of the "New Constantine," if only posthumously, on account of his zeal in stamping out paganism throughout his realm,⁶⁷ is conceivable, if hard to prove.⁶⁸ Regarding relations between Makouria and its southern neighbour, the kingdom of Alodia, we have little data for this period. Whether or not the royal families of the two kingdoms intermarried at this time, as has been suggested,⁶⁹ the cultural impact of Makouria on Alodia is clear. It can be seen, for example, in the great cathedral at Soba East, which displays a number of similarities with the cathedrals of Faras and Old Dongola.⁷⁰ Likewise, the pottery known as Soba Ware typical of early Alodia disappears around the mid-eighth century and is replaced by a flood of Dongola Ware.⁷¹

Evidence of some of the construction projects during Merkurios' reign is preserved at Faras where, in 707, the town's seventh-century mudbrick church was renovated and greatly enlarged by the local bishop, Paulos, as recorded on two foundation stones inscribed in Greek and Coptic respectively.⁷² That Merkurios is mentioned by name on both stones⁷³ testifies to the role of patronage by Makourian royalty in the formation of Nubian art and architecture during the eighth century.⁷⁴ Indeed, it is possible that the plan of the renovated cathedral at Faras was based on that of the so-called Church of the Granite Columns at Old Dongola.⁷⁵ In its renovated form, the cathedral at Faras consisted of a nave and four aisles and, over the course of its history, it was lavishly decorated with frescoes. Although only traces of the earliest frescoes survive,⁷⁶ a continuous sequence of frescoes, with each new phase laid on top of the preceding one, has been established from ca. 750 down to the eleventh century.⁷⁷ The basis for this chronological sequence is a list of bishops of Faras with their respective periods in office, painted on a wall in the southeastern corner of the cathedral, together with portraits of several such bishops and tombstones bearing inscriptions that give the precise years in which some of the bishops

67 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 38.

68 A Greek inscription from Tafa, dating from the reign of Merkurios and recording the foundation of a church on the site of a pagan temple (Łajtar, "Varia Nubica," 33–37), might seem to reflect an effort to stamp out paganism, though there is no reason to believe that the temple in question was still in use as late as Merkurios' time.

69 Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 86. There are some indications of a marriage alliance between Makouria and Alodia in the eleventh century (Ruffini, "History of Medieval Nubia").

70 Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 86.

71 Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 86.

72 Shinnie, "Christian Nubia," 575.

73 Shinnie, "Christian Nubia," 575.

74 Godlewski, "Early Period," 278.

75 Godlewski, "Early Period," 291–92.

76 Godlewski, "Early Period," 290.

77 Shinnie, "Christian Nubia," 575.

died.⁷⁸ In addition to the small fragments of frescoes in the Faras cathedral that predate the mid-eighth century, more complete frescoes dating from as early as the seventh century have been found in churches at such sites as Abū Oda, Nag' al-'Uqba, Wādī al-Sabū', Dabayra, and 'Abdallāh Nirqī.⁷⁹ What survives of this seventh-century corpus suggests parallels with Coptic murals from Bāwiṭ and Saqqāra in Egypt.⁸⁰ In the case of the so-called "Violet Style," a style of painting introduced in the Faras cathedral ca. 750, earlier studies emphasized Byzantine influence, even attributing frescoes executed in this style to Byzantine artisans fleeing the iconoclasm controversy.⁸¹ More recent studies, however, emphasize the role of local Nubian artists in producing these frescoes.⁸²

Under Merkurios' successor Kyriakos, Makourian relations with Egypt became strained. During a period of persecution of Egypt's Christian community by their Muslim rulers, the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria was imprisoned.⁸³ In response, Kyriakos is reported by John the Deacon to have invaded Egypt in 747/748. Before he reached the provincial capital of al-Fuṣṭāṭ (*Miṣr*),⁸⁴ his envoy, the Nubatian eparch, was sent to the *amīr* of Egypt, 'Abd al-Malik, to solicit the release of the patriarch—only to be imprisoned himself. Upon hearing of the arrival of Kyriakos' forces at al-Fuṣṭāṭ, however, 'Abd al-Malik, having no means of resistance, gave into the Nubians' demands and released both the patriarch and the eparch. The mission accomplished, the Nubian army thereupon withdrew from Egypt. As with the Arabic reports about the seventh-century Muslim invasions of Nubia and the *baqt*, the historicity of certain details in this narrative has been questioned.⁸⁵ While the reference to the dispatch of the Nubian eparch to al-Fuṣṭāṭ and his detention there seems plausible enough, it is unlikely that the Nubian army got any further than Upper Egypt.⁸⁶ Even so, it is possible that this invasion fostered the idea that the Nubian king was capable of standing up to the Muslims, leading Coptic Christians like John the Deacon to view him as their defender.⁸⁷ If so, this attitude might have led John to exaggerate some details in his report on Kyriakos' reign.

Within three years of Kyriakos' intervention in Egyptian affairs, whatever the extent of his invasion, the Umayyad dynasty which had ruled the Islamic empire since 661 was overthrown by their rivals, the 'Abbāsids. The effects of this shift in power would soon be felt in Nubia, for in 750, the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II bin Muḥammad, fled to Egypt, only to die there in battle. His sons 'Abd Allāh and 'Ubayd Allāh thereupon

⁷⁸ Shinnie, "Christian Nubia," 575–76; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 233–37.

⁷⁹ Godlewski, "Early Period," 287.

⁸⁰ Godlewski, "Early Period," 290.

⁸¹ Shinnie, "Christian Nubia," 570.

⁸² Christides, "Nubia and Egypt," 349; Godlewski, "Early Period," 296.

⁸³ Vantini, *Oriental Sources*, 43–44.

⁸⁴ Cairo did not yet exist at this time, as it was founded only in 969 CE by the Fāṭimids. In time, it came to encompass the original settlement of al-Fuṣṭāṭ.

⁸⁵ Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 84.

⁸⁶ Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 84.

⁸⁷ Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 84.

fled with their family members and followers to Nubia with the hope of establishing a base from which to strike back at the ‘Abbāsids.⁸⁸ Once their request to remain in Nubia was rejected by the Nubian authorities, perhaps fearing the repercussions were their country to be used as a springboard for anti-‘Abbāsīd resistance, the Umayyad refugees fled again, this time to the Beja lands of the Eastern Desert.⁸⁹ After their company was robbed and ‘Ubayd Allāh died, his brother ‘Abd Allāh escaped to Mecca, where he was recognized by the local authorities and arrested.⁹⁰ Although the Nubians had refused to aid the Umayyads, they might not have warmed immediately to the ‘Abbāsīd regime that replaced them. Significant in this regard is a unique Arabic papyrus from Qaṣr Ibrīm, dated 141 AH (758 CE) and preserving a letter addressed to a Nubian king (*ṣāḥib al-Maqrura wal-Nūba*) from the then governor of Egypt, Mūsā bin Kaʿb. The letter includes a lengthy complaint about the Nubians shirking their responsibilities with regards to the *baqt*, together with various other misdemeanours.⁹¹ If Spaulding is correct that the Nubians’ dispatch of gifts to Egypt signified their recognition of the legitimacy of whichever power held sway there, such laxness in gift-giving might well have had serious political consequences. Although the name of the Nubian king in question is not preserved on the papyrus, he can confidently be identified with Kyriakos, whose reign lasted until sometime after 768.⁹² Among the other complaints made by Mūsā bin Kaʿb in his letter are that the Nubians had failed to return fugitive slaves to the Muslims and that they had needlessly detained merchants—one of whom the Nubian king’s deputy (*khalīfa*), probably the eparch,⁹³ had actually beaten. These occasional squabbles aside, the Nubians appear to have generally remained on good terms with their Muslim neighbours down to the mid-twelfth century. Evidence to that effect is provided by medieval Arabic tombstones found in Nubia, some of them dating as far back as the 830s, which indicate the gradual settlement of Muslims in the region, perhaps coupled with the conversion of some Nubians to Islam.⁹⁴ Citing the earlier work of Ibn Salīm al-Aswānī, al-Maqrīzī writes that the Alodian capital maintained a hostel for Muslims (*lahā ribāt fihi jamāʿa min al-Muslimīn*).⁹⁵

Throughout this *pax nubiana*, and to a large degree because of it, the Middle Nile Valley witnessed a remarkable flourishing of Christian culture. The frescoes decorating Nubian churches that we have touched on above represent one aspect of this. Written material is equally significant. A study of the chronological distribution of medieval Nubian texts indicates that the eighth and ninth centuries mark a watershed in Nubian literacy. This sudden outburst in the production of texts, following two centuries in

⁸⁸ Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 86.

⁸⁹ Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 86.

⁹⁰ Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 86.

⁹¹ Hinds and Sakkout, “Letter.”

⁹² Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 260.

⁹³ Hinds and Sakkout, “Letter,” 184n33.

⁹⁴ Obłuski, “First Contacts,” 127–28.

⁹⁵ al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawāʿiz*, I: 193.

which written sources had been quite scarce, is best explained by political and administrative changes in Nubia under powerful kings like Merkurios and Kyriakos.⁹⁶ Although the written material produced during this period includes such varied genres as documentary texts, literary and liturgical works, prayers, visitors' inscriptions, and graffiti, funerary epitaphs constitute a particularly important corpus. According to Ochała, the radical increase in the number of epitaphs suggests that these changes did not only affect the more official elements of Nubian life. Perceived as the means to express private piety, they show that Nubian society as a whole became more religiously conscious or, simply, that its manner of expressing personal piety changed.⁹⁷ Ochała is, however, careful to qualify this observation in light of the geographical distribution of texts dating from the eighth and ninth centuries, pointing out that the region between the First and Third Cataracts appears to have been more developed in terms of literacy than the Makourian heartland between the Third and Fifth Cataracts, while in Alodia the amount of written output was smaller still.⁹⁸

The languages in which this material was produced were Greek, Coptic, and Old Nubian.⁹⁹ According to the tenth-century Muslim scholar Ibn al-Nadīm, the Christians of Nubia wrote in both Greek and Coptic (*al-Rūmiyya wal-Qibṭiyya*) for religious purposes (*min ajl al-dīn*).¹⁰⁰ As we shall see shortly, Greek enjoyed widespread use in medieval Nubia. By contrast, Coptic was reserved mainly for epitaphs,¹⁰¹ though in light of evidence from Qaṣr Ibrīm it seems to have also been employed on occasion in administrative documents.¹⁰² It remained in use only until the twelfth century, at about the time it died out as a written language in Egypt,¹⁰³ and its place in Nubia was thereafter completely co-opted by Old Nubian. For his part, Ibn Salīm al-Aswānī, as preserved by al-Maqrīzī, states that the inhabitants of the southern Nubian kingdom of Alodia possessed books in Greek, but that these were interpreted for the masses in the local tongue (*kutubuhum bil-Rūmiyya yufassirūnahā bi-lisānihim*).¹⁰⁴ Among the material evidence for this joint usage of Old Nubian and Greek is a leaf from a bilingual Old Nubian–Greek psalter from

96 Ochała, "Multilingualism," 16–18, 19.

97 Ochała, "Multilingualism," 19.

98 Ochała, "Multilingualism," 21.

99 Arabic was also employed at times in medieval (mostly Lower) Nubia, though not to the same extent as the other languages, and then mostly in connection with trade and diplomacy with Muslim Egypt (Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 239). Since most, if not all, of this Arabic material was produced by Muslims rather than by Christian Nubians, it shall be excluded from discussion here.

100 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, I: 19. As a caveat, it should be noted that Ibn al-Nadīm also states that the Nubians wrote in Syriac (*al-Suryāniyya*), which is clearly incorrect—unless one assumes that by "Syriac" Ibn al-Nadīm means Old Nubian.

101 Ochała, "Multilingualism," 34.

102 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 238–39, Ochała, "Multilingualism," 41, 44.

103 Ochała, "Multilingualism," 27, 30.

104 al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawāʿiz*, I: 193.

Qaşr İbrīm,¹⁰⁵ and a wooden plank from the same site, inscribed with verses from Psalms 149 and 150 in alternating Old Nubian and Greek translations.¹⁰⁶

Although the Nubian church was under the tutelage of the Coptic patriarchate at Alexandria rather than the Melkite patriarchate at Constantinople, Greek remained the dominant foreign language in Nubian scribal culture during the Early Middle Ages, even as it died out in early medieval Egypt.¹⁰⁷ The importance of Greek is evident from the funerary epitaphs that appear in the eighth century and contain versions of a Byzantine prayer for the dead.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, the Nubians did not simply copy the formulas of this prayer in a mechanical, uncomprehending manner, but actually understood them and the theology which they conveyed. This is clear from the manner in which the basic prayer was modified to suit the individual being commemorated.¹⁰⁹ The choice of Greek as the language in which to express such sentiments, notwithstanding Nubia's ties to the Coptic church, undoubtedly owes something to the long history of the use of Greek in Nubia. Already in the second quarter of the third century BCE, the Kushite king Arkamaniqo, known to the Graeco-Roman world as Ergamenes, received a Greek education,¹¹⁰ while in later centuries Greek remained the language of choice in Kushite diplomatic relations with the Roman Empire.¹¹¹ Another Nubian who received a Greek education, a Roman-period cavalry officer named Paccius Maximus, inscribed his own poetic compositions in Greek on the walls of the temples of Kalabsha and Hieria Sykaminos.¹¹² Greek survived the collapse of the Kushite state and remained in use in the nascent kingdom of Nubatia.¹¹³ In medieval Nubia, foreign political and administrative terminology was almost entirely borrowed from Late Roman/Byzantine Greek usage, including such terms as *basileus*, *eparchos*, *exarchos*, *domestikos*, and *meizoteris*, as well as such Hellenized Latin terms as *rix*/*rex*, *primikerios*, *augustus*, and *caesar*.¹¹⁴ Greek, then, served as a language of official religion and personal piety which was used across the entire length of Nubia down to the late fourteenth century.¹¹⁵

Although there is abundant evidence for the use of Greek in pre-Christian Nubia, the early history of Old Nubian is far more obscure. Nubian-speakers, hailing most probably from Dārfūr or Kordofān, where East Sudanic languages of the Nubian branch are still spoken, may have established a presence in Nubia as early as the second

105 Christides, "Nubia and Egypt," 352.

106 Ruffini, "Psalms 149–150."

107 Ochała, "Multilingualism," 43.

108 Burstein, "African Language," 58.

109 Łajtar, "Greek Inscriptions," 115–16; Burstein, "African Language," 58.

110 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, §3.6.3.

111 Burstein, "African Language," 49, 53.

112 Burstein, "African Language," 51.

113 For other examples of the use of Greek in post-Kushite Nubia, see Rilly, "Last Traces," 197.

114 Burstein, "African Language," 56. For a discussion of these and other titles in medieval Nubia, as well as their relationship to Byzantine titles, see Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 250–53, 255–64.

115 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 238; Ochała, "Multilingualism," 44.

millennium BCE.¹¹⁶ After the fall of Kush, Nubian supplanted Meroitic, the latter a related East Sudanic language that had long dominated the Middle Nile Valley.¹¹⁷ It is not until the early medieval period, however, that we find written material in Old Nubian. Some Old Nubian vocabulary in a Greek inscription dating from 797 CE has been thought to represent the earliest attestation of this language, though a bilingual Coptic–Old Nubian papyrus now seems to be older, based on paleographic grounds.¹¹⁸ Like the Coptic Christians of Egypt, medieval Nubians used a modified form of the Greek alphabet to write their language, adding letters to represent Nubian phonemes that do not exist in Greek. These letters include a few signs borrowed from the Coptic alphabet, ultimately of Demotic Egyptian origin, representing *š*, *f*, and *h*; a modified Coptic sign for *j*; and signs borrowed from the Meroitic script for *ŋ*, *ñ*, and *w*.¹¹⁹ A variant of the standard Old Nubian script, used to write what seems to be a southern dialect of Old Nubian, included further signs derived from Meroitic, namely the signs for *k^w* and *j*.¹²⁰ That the Old Nubian script employed several signs of Meroitic origin, dating back to the Kushite period, indicates that there must have been a time during which the two scripts overlapped in use.¹²¹ Today, however, hard evidence for such a coexistence is lacking, for the latest datable Meroitic inscription dates from the early fifth century, some 300 years before the earliest Old Nubian texts.¹²² Although it might have been the case that the Old Nubian script was devised as early as the mid-sixth century, at about the time of the official Christianization of Nubia,¹²³ the fact that texts in Old Nubian only became common in later centuries suggests that the language was slow in achieving prestige as a written language. Initially, Old Nubian was used only for religious purposes,¹²⁴ but by the turn of the tenth century it gained greater currency and came to be used as well for secular documents, including those pertaining to internal matters at the Makourian court.¹²⁵ By the second half of the eleventh century, Old Nubian terms were devised for administrative offices, a development that might owe something to the broader Nubianizing trends during the same period, as evidenced by the growing preference for Nubian-style (as opposed to

116 This hypothesis is based on the attestation of Middle Egyptian loanwords—not found in Coptic—in Nile Nubian, as well as toponyms of Nubian origin in Egyptian topographic lists dating from the second millennium BCE (Bechhaus-Gerst, “Rekonstruktionen,” 104–6). See, however, Cooper (“Toponymic Strata,” 206–7) who favours a later, Graeco-Roman period date for the diffusion of Nubian to the Nile Valley. Conceivably, there were multiple migrations of Nubian-speakers to the Nile Valley during antiquity.

117 On the East Sudanic origin of Meroitic, see Rilly, “Last Traces,” 185.

118 Rilly, “Last Traces,” 198, 200n14. Rilly mistakenly implies that the text from 797 is categorically Old Nubian.

119 Rilly, “Last Traces,” 191, 197; Satzinger, “Some More Remarks,” 749.

120 Rilly, “Last Traces,” 197–98.

121 Rilly, “Last Traces,” 191, 199.

122 Rilly, “Last Traces,” 192.

123 Rilly, “Last Traces,” 198.

124 Burstein, “African Language,” 59.

125 Ochała, “Multilingualism,” 30, 33.

Byzantine-style) royal regalia and the increasing popularity of the cult of Saint Anna, a local Nubian saint.¹²⁶ Although the last known text in the language dates from the late fifteenth century,¹²⁷ Old Nubian is generally regarded as the ancestor of Nobiin (also known as Mahas), the Nubian language historically spoken in the area between the First and Third Cataracts.¹²⁸ Another, lesser-known and now extinct, Nubian dialect existed in Alodia.¹²⁹

An Ethiopian Dark Age?

At about the time that Christianity was making significant inroads into Nubian society, Ethiopia entered a period of obscurity from which it did not re-emerge until sometime around the eleventh century.¹³⁰ During this period, indigenous written material is extremely scarce, while the archaeological investigation of medieval sites in Ethiopia is only just beginning.¹³¹ Consequently, precious little is known about the history of Ethiopia during the Early Middle Ages, and, apart from contact—not always peaceful, as we shall see—with the early Islamic empire, the country appears to have largely ceased political and military engagement abroad. From the vantage point of late antiquity, this development comes as something of a surprise. An individual living in northern Ethiopia in the early sixth century would have had every reason to believe that that country would remain a major power for the next few centuries—much more so, indeed, than Nubia. It was, after all, in the first half of the sixth century that Aksum adopted a proactive foreign policy vis-à-vis Ḥimyar, while Nubia during the same period had become a backwater. But with the loss of its South Arabian empire and the decline of northern Ethiopia itself not long thereafter, Aksum had become a shadow of its former self by the end of the sixth century.

It is generally believed that the Aksumite state finally collapsed sometime in the seventh century and that some regional power formerly under Aksumite rule came to the fore in the northern highlands. With so little data from this period with which to work, however, one cannot exclude the possibility that the political centre of the Aksumite kingdom shifted elsewhere. Arabic sources, which provide the only foreign

126 Godlewski, “Archbishop Georgios,” 669, 672–73; Łajtar, “Dongola 2010,” 292–93.

127 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 239.

128 Spaulding, “Fate of Alodia,” 288; Satzinger, “Old Nubian,” 748. Distinct from Nobiin are two other Nubian languages: Kenzi, historically spoken in Egyptian Nubia, and Dongolawi, spoken in the Dongola Reach in northern Sudan. These two languages appear to be more closely related to the (nearly extinct) Birgid language of Dārfūr, and to various other languages of Kordofān, than to Old Nubian and its Nobiin descendant (Satzinger, “Old Nubian”).

129 Haycock, “Medieval Nubia,” 27. The doubts expressed by Spaulding (“Fate of Alodia,” 25–27) regarding the use of Nubian in Alodia are unfounded (Tsakos, *Miscellanea Epigraphica*, passim; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 46).

130 Lepage, “Aksum et Lalibela,” 9; Phillipson, *Foundations*, 228.

131 Hirsch and Fauvelle-Aymar, “L’Éthiopie médiévale”; Finneran, “Settlement Archaeology”; Gleize et al., “Cimetière médiéval”; Insoll et al., “Archaeological Survey.”

documentation of Ethiopian affairs in the Early Middle Ages, do not clarify matters much. Al-Azraqī (d. ca. 865 CE), for instance, writes of an Ethiopian king (*najāshī*) based in the “region of Aksum” (*arḍ Aksūm*), but since the king in question is said to have been a contemporary of ʾAbrəhā,¹³² he is therefore to be identified with the sixth-century Aksumite ruler Kālēb, not with an Ethiopian king who reigned during al-Azraqī’s time. Al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 897/8 CE) mentions an Ethiopian town named Kuʿbar¹³³ but says nothing about an Aksumite connection. That the town is distinct from Aksum is evident from al-Yaʿqūbī’s statement that it lay near the Red Sea coast,¹³⁴ which rules out Aksum as a candidate. A few decades later, al-Masʿūdī (d. 956 CE) refers to Kuʿbar as the residence of the Ethiopian king (*dār mamlakat al-najāshī*), adding that the dominion of this king bordered the Red Sea (*al-baḥr al-Ḥabashī*).¹³⁵ It is not clear from the Arabic sources how far into the interior the polity based at Kuʿbar extended, nor even whether it was the only such polity that existed in Ethiopia at the time. Archaeologically speaking, the Aksumite collapse was accompanied by the abandonment of most major settlements. The town of Aksum itself managed to survive, though it too shrank in size. Since the site of Kuʿbar has yet to be discovered, it is impossible to say how significant a settlement it might have been. Indeed, it might not have been a permanent settlement at all but rather a peripatetic camp that periodically moved as the ruler toured his territory, as was the case throughout much of the second millennium.¹³⁶

RIÉth 193I+II+III, a crudely carved Gəʿəz inscription from Aksum—actually a series of related texts—that is generally accepted as post-Aksumite in date, might seem to have potential as a source that could shed light on this period.¹³⁷ Like medieval Arabic sources, however, it raises more questions than it answers, and the fact that much of the inscription is illegible is only part of the problem. The king in whose name it was carved, one Dānəʿəl, bears the title of *ḥaḍānī* “guardian” rather than “king of Aksum.”¹³⁸ He was clearly a Christian, for his inscription invokes the Trinity with the words “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*ba-səma ʾab wa-wald wa-manfas qəddūs*).¹³⁹ Moreover, Dānəʿəl is called “a son of the Monastery of Fərēm” (*walda dabra Fərēm*),¹⁴⁰ suggesting that in his earlier years he was associated with a monastery

132 Wüstenfeld, *Chroniken*, I: 88.

133 al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Tārīkh*, I: 219.

134 al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Tārīkh*, I: 219.

135 al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-Dḥahab*, 439.

136 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 211. Possible remains of one such royal camp have been identified at Məṣhalā Maryam in the Šāwa province of central Ethiopia (Hirsch and Fauvelle-Aymar, “L’Éthiopie médiévale,” 328–29).

137 RIÉth stands for *Recueil des inscriptions de l’Éthiopie*; see Drewes and Scheiner, “Les Inscriptions.”

138 RIÉth 193I/3–4; RIÉth 193II/3–4 (Drewes and Scheiner, “Les Inscriptions,” 279, 280).

139 RIÉth 193I/1–3; RIÉth 193II/1–2 (Drewes and Scheiner, “Les Inscriptions,” 279, 280).

140 RIÉth 193I/4–5; RIÉth 193II/4–5 (Drewes and Scheiner, “Les Inscriptions,” 279, 280).

founded in memory of the evangelist of Aksum, Frumentius (Gəʿəz *Fərēmnaṭōs*).¹⁴¹ In so far as Dānəʿēl's inscription can be read, it appears to record military operations, judging from such statements as *qatalkəwwōmū* "I killed them" and large numerals which seem to quantify slain enemies, prisoners, and livestock seized in battle. Unfortunately, this is about all that can be said about Dānəʿēl,¹⁴² and since estimates of the date of his inscription range from the seventh century to as late as the twelfth,¹⁴³ it is hard to find a place for him in the broader scheme of Ethiopian history. The Arab author Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 973 CE) states that in his day Ethiopia was ruled by a woman who had killed a king of Ethiopia known as the *ḥaḍānī*,¹⁴⁴ though it is not clear whether this king can be identified with Dānəʿēl, as the title *ḥaḍānī* might have been borne by several Ethiopian rulers during the Early Middle Ages.

Whatever their shortcomings when it comes to information on internal politics in Ethiopia, Arabic sources do provide important, if frustratingly laconic, data on Ethiopian relations with the Arabian Peninsula in late antique and early medieval times. According to these sources, Ethiopia was one of the regions with which the town of Mecca traded during the sixth century.¹⁴⁵ Although Muhammad, despite his early career as a merchant, never travelled to Ethiopia himself, he operated in a milieu that was influenced by contact with Ethiopia, as evidenced, for example, by the presence of Gəʿəz loanwords in the Qurʾān.¹⁴⁶ There are even some reports that Muhammad himself could speak at least some "Ethiopian" (*al-Ḥabashī*),¹⁴⁷ which in this context probably means Gəʿəz. Given the close ties between the Ḥijāz (i.e. the region in western Arabia where Mecca and Medina are located) and Ethiopia, it is no surprise that it was to Ethiopia that several of Muhammad's companions fled around 615, during a period of particularly intense persecution by the Meccan tribe of Quraysh.¹⁴⁸ Arabic authors state that the Ethiopian king of the time was one Aṣḥama bin Abjar, whom a number of modern scholars identify with ʿĪllā Ṣaḥam, a seventh-century king mentioned in medieval Ethiopian king-lists.¹⁴⁹ Given the spuriousness of much of the material contained in such king-lists, however, this identification should be treated with caution. Islamic tradition holds that Aṣḥama embraced Islam,¹⁵⁰ but since it is highly unlikely that a foreign ruler would have felt inclined to

141 On the significance of this reference and a possible location of the monastery in question, see Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 164.

142 On the problematic interpretation of RIÉth 193I+II+III, see Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 163–66.

143 Munro-Hay and Nosnitsin, "Danəʿel," 84.

144 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, I: 59.

145 Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 124–29.

146 Kropp, "Viele fremde Tische"; Kropp, "Ethiopic Satan"; Kropp, "Beyond Single Words."

147 Donzel, "Al-Nadjāshī," 862.

148 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya*, I: 321–32; II: 359–70. Other sources claim that there was a second migration to Ethiopia (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, I: 205–6).

149 Fiaccadori, "ʿĪllā Ṣaḥam," 262–3.

150 Donzel, "Al-Nadjāshī," 863.

convert to a religion that was not yet fully formed in its doctrines and rituals and was scarcely known outside Arabia, the historicity of this conversion is dubious.

Although the *najāshī* had graciously granted asylum to some of Muhammad's followers, relations between the early Islamic empire and Ethiopia were not always so cordial. From Arabic sources we learn of a series of Ethiopian raids on the coast of the Ḥijāz during the seventh century and at the beginning of the eighth. The first took place in June–August 630, when Muhammad was informed that the inhabitants of al-Shu'ayba—then the port for Mecca—had seen Ethiopians in ships.¹⁵¹ That the Ethiopians in question meant harm is evident from the fact that Muhammad sent a general, 'Alqama bin Mujazzaz al-Mudlijī, on a punitive naval campaign against them.¹⁵² This seems not to have been a major military undertaking, for it involved only 300 men, though it was enough to expel the Ethiopians from the unnamed island which they had occupied.¹⁵³ Then, during the reign of the caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb (634–644 CE), the Ethiopians attacked “one of the frontiers of the Islamic realm” (*ṭaraf min aṭrāf al-Islām*).¹⁵⁴ Although we are not told where the Ethiopians attacked, a sea raid on the Ḥijāzī coast is likely given the context of the engagement in 630. In response to these renewed aggressions, 'Alqama bin Mujazzaz, by now residing in Jerusalem as governor of Palestine, was sent by 'Umar on another campaign against the Ethiopians ca. 641 or 642, this time targeting Ethiopia itself in a full-fledged naval raid.¹⁵⁵ Al-Iṣbahānī (d. 967 CE) states that the Ethiopians succeeded in halting the Muslim advance by poisoning a local water source, and that, once 'Umar saw the large number of deaths among the Muslim troops that resulted, he called off the invasion.¹⁵⁶ According to al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), however, another naval attack on “the blacks” (*al-asāwida*) took place in 651 during the reign of 'Uthmān bin 'Affān (644–656 CE).¹⁵⁷ Although al-Ṭabarī says nothing about the origin of these “blacks,” they can hardly have been other than the Ethiopians, who were the sole African group operating in the Red Sea at this time. The last recorded Ethiopian attack on the Ḥijāzī coast took place in 702. According to al-Fāsī (d. 1429), this attack prompted the Meccans to respond with a punitive campaign that defeated the Ethiopians.¹⁵⁸ The defeat was evidently a decisive one, since after this engagement Ethiopian raids in the Red Sea appear to have ceased.

Such raids were a far cry from Aksumite intervention in South Arabia during the first half of the sixth century. It is likely that, with the decline of the Aksumite state, many Ethiopians were driven by economic necessity to raid the Ḥijāzī coast, and that the lack of a strong ruling authority in Ethiopia enabled them to pursue this course of action

151 al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, III: 983.

152 al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, III: 983.

153 al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, III: 983.

154 al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, V: 2595.

155 al-Ya'qūbī, *al-Tārīkh*, II: 178–79.

156 al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, VI: 149.

157 al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tārīkh*, V: 2865.

158 Wüstenfeld, *Chroniken*, II: 74.

with little or no hindrance. Whether the rise of the Islamic empire itself played a role in Aksum's decline has long been assumed but lacks hard evidence. While Muslim attacks ultimately neutralized any maritime threat posed by the Ethiopians, such operations do not seem to have had much long-term effect on Ethiopia itself. Traces of conflagration in the uppermost stratum at the Aksumite trading centre of Adulis have been attributed to Muslim military action,¹⁵⁹ though there is little evidence that the fires can be attributed to a single event, that the entire site was affected, or even that the burning was deliberate.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, why should Adulis have been destroyed by the Muslims at all when Arabic sources present the invasion of Ethiopia launched by 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb as a failure?

That relatively little thought was given to Ethiopia by the early caliphs suggests that the country was not viewed as a serious threat. How, then, was it viewed? A fresco at the Umayyad lodge of Quṣayr 'Amra in eastern Jordan might provide an answer. It depicts a delegation to an Umayyad *amīr* consisting of six foreign rulers, who stand in two ranks.¹⁶¹ Each ruler stretches out both hands with palms turned upwards in a gesture of supplication towards the Muslim prince represented on an adjacent wall.¹⁶² The rulers have been identified as the Byzantine emperor, the Visigothic king of Spain, the Sasanian emperor, the king of Ethiopia, and two other rulers whose identities are uncertain but who might be a Turkish (or Indian) king and a Chinese emperor respectively.¹⁶³ The Visigothic king is labelled *Lu/ūdhriq*, i.e. Roderic, the name of the last Visigothic ruler, who was defeated by the Muslim general Ṭāriq bin Ziyād in 711, though it could be that his name is here used stereotypically as a generic name for Visigothic monarchs.¹⁶⁴ Likewise, the Sasanian emperor is labelled *Kisrā* (Middle Persian: *Khusraw*), a personal name which, although borne by several Sasanian rulers, was employed by medieval Arabic authors as a generic title for Sasanian emperors.¹⁶⁵ The foreign ruler who is our main concern, however, is the Ethiopian king, identified by captions in Greek and Arabic that give his royal title. Of these captions, enough remains of the Greek and Arabic¹⁶⁶ for us to interpret these as two variant words for "king" in Gə'əz, Greek *Ni/ēgos* being derived from *naḡūs*, Arabic *Najāshī* from *naḡāshī*.

On the surface, the depiction of an Ethiopian monarch side by side with the rulers of such major powers as Rome, Persia, and (perhaps) China and India/Central Asia would seem to suggest that Ethiopia was likewise regarded as a major power by the Umayyads. But here we run into a problem in that the lodge at Quṣayr 'Amra was most likely built in the early to mid-730s for the future caliph al-Walīd (II) bin Yazīd, while he was still a

159 For example, Cerulli, "Ethiopia's Relations," 577.

160 Glazier and Peacock, "Historical Background," 11–12.

161 Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 198.

162 Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 198–99.

163 Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 203–7.

164 Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 204, 205.

165 Morony, "Kisrā."

166 Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 204, 206.

prince.¹⁶⁷ This is long after the final defeat of the Sasanians by the Muslims in the mid-seventh century, and two decades after the Muslims' defeat of the Visigoths, making the depiction of the Sasanian and Visigothic rulers at Quṣayr 'Amra anachronistic. That these potentates share space in the Quṣayr 'Amra fresco with rulers who, while still undefeated, were viewed as having been marginalized by the expansion of the Islamic empire might reflect the idealized manner in which the Umayyads wished to see themselves: as sovereigns enjoying special status, to whom kings from distant lands came to pay their respects. In this scheme, the equally stereotypical Ethiopian king fell into the category of marginalized rulers. On one level, the last Ethiopian attempt to attack the Hījāzī coast had been thwarted in 702, thereby eliminating any remaining Ethiopian threat to the Muslims. On another, there were the Islamic traditions—ahistorical but influential nonetheless—that the Ethiopian king of Muhammad's time had embraced Islam and had thus, in a sense, been won over by the Islamic empire. Seen from this perspective, the depiction of an Ethiopian ruler in the fresco at Quṣayr 'Amra reflects not Ethiopia's continued status as a world power in the early eighth century but rather its relegation to the status of the defunct regimes of the Visigoths and Sasanians.

As with early medieval Nubia, the normalization of Ethiopian relations with the Muslims during the eighth century facilitated Muslim settlement in the region, as well as the conversion of some Ethiopians to Islam. Permanent Muslim settlement was at first restricted to the Dahlak Archipelago, located off the Eritrean coast, where the Umayyads established a penal colony. Already in the reign of the Umayyad caliph Sulaymān bin 'Abd al-Malik (715–717 CE), the poet al-Aḥwāṣ was exiled there as punishment for writing satirical verses.¹⁶⁸ At the beginning of the tenth century, an autonomous Muslim principality had established itself in the archipelago, thereby providing a base from which Islam was diffused to the African mainland.¹⁶⁹ Our main source for the medieval history of the Dahlak Archipelago is a series of some 200 tombstones, inscribed in Arabic, which have come to light on Dahlak Kabīr, the main island in the archipelago. Dating between 911 and 1539, the inscriptions on these tombstones allow us to partially reconstruct the chronology and genealogies of the Dahlak sultans, primarily from the eleventh century on.¹⁷⁰ According to Ibn Ḥawqal, the ruler of the Dahlak Islands (*ṣāhib jazā'ir Dahlak*) was in the habit of sending gifts (*hadāyā*) to the Ziyādīd ruler of Yemen, consisting of slaves, ambergris, and leopard skins, among other items.¹⁷¹ With the exception of the ambergris, these commodities can only have come from interior regions in the Horn of Africa, most likely via the caravan route linking southern Təgray with the Red Sea coast.¹⁷² Gold and salt probably also passed along the same route, as they had in Aksumite times.¹⁷³ The

167 Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 142–62, esp. 161–62.

168 Cerulli, "Ethiopia's Relations," 577.

169 Cerulli, "Ethiopia's Relations."

170 Cerulli, "Ethiopia's Relations," 578.

171 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, I: 24.

172 Lepage, "Aksum et Lalibela," 34, 35 (fig. 21), 36; Smidt, "Weitere arabische Inschrift," 126.

173 Lepage, "Aksum et Lalibela," 36.

discovery of medieval Arabic funerary inscriptions along this route, at sites like Wägər Ḥariba and K^wəḥa, testifies to the activity of Muslim merchants in the Ethiopian interior.¹⁷⁴ A fragment of the oldest known Arabic inscription from the region, currently kept at the church of Čärqos Wəqro in eastern Təgray but deriving from another structure, can be dated on paleographic grounds to the ninth or tenth century.¹⁷⁵ The inscription is executed in raised relief and, given its high quality, may derive from a mosque that once stood in the area.¹⁷⁶

Further evidence of Ethiopian trade with the Islamic world during the first three centuries of the Islamic era is provided by a coin hoard from the monastery at Dābrā Damo in Təgray. Discovered in poorly documented circumstances, the hoard includes coins of the second to third century deriving from the Kuṣāṇa dynasty of northwestern India and Afghanistan,¹⁷⁷ together with Islamic silver and gold coins ranging in date from the end of the seventh century to the mid-tenth.¹⁷⁸ Although the Kuṣāṇa coins most likely found their way to Ethiopia through Aksumite trade with India¹⁷⁹ and were then collected at some point during the Early Middle Ages, the Islamic coins indicate commercial ties between Ethiopia and the Islamic world, whether by way of the Nile Valley or, more probably, via the Red Sea. That coins of such widely divergent dates were collected and deposited in a single hoard suggests that they served as bullion rather than actual currency. What this evidence of Muslim contact with Ethiopia during the early medieval period suggests is that, although Ethiopia was no longer the world power it had been in the sixth century, it still maintained relations with the outside world. Nevertheless, Ethiopia's foreign trade does not appear to have extended far beyond the countries bordering the Red Sea during this period. Arabic sources suggest that contact between the Red Sea region and India, on the level evidenced between the first and sixth centuries, did not revive until the ninth century,¹⁸⁰ while the Indian Ocean cowry shells and objects of Indian manufacture that have come to light at medieval sites in Ethiopia derive from contexts datable to the twelfth century or later.¹⁸¹

That Ethiopia also managed to remain afloat culturally is suggested by Phillipson's studies of early churches in Ethiopia's Təgray Province, which have revealed some intriguing continuities with the Aksumite period. Funerary and reliquary churches, already attested during Aksumite times at the town of Aksum and perhaps also at Mätära, are found in rock-hewn form at Dəgum and nearby sites in the Ḥāwzen Plain in eastern Təgray.¹⁸² These may mark the transition to hypogaeum churches (i.e. subterranean

174 Smidt, "Weitere arabische Inschrift," 127, 129.

175 Smidt, "Weitere arabische Inschrift," 132. On the interpretation of what survives of the text, see 130–2.

176 Smidt, "Weitere arabische Inschrift," 132, 134–35.

177 Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 28 (and the sources cited therein).

178 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 193.

179 On Aksumite trade with India, see Phillipson, *Foundations*, 192, 200.

180 Power, "Expansion," 115–16.

181 Finneran, "Settlement Archaeology," 286; Insoll et al., "Archaeological Survey," 36.

182 Lepage, "Aksum et Lalibela," 22, 24, 28; Phillipson, *Foundations*, 185.

churches excavated in the bedrock) and have been tentatively dated between the sixth and eighth centuries.¹⁸³ A second group of churches in Təgray, at ʾAbrəha wä-ʾAṣbəḥa, Čärqos Wəqro, and Mikaʾel Amba, take the form of cross-in-square hypogaea which might have had a funerary or religious function and could date between the eighth and tenth centuries.¹⁸⁴ These hypogaeum churches retain a number of features typical of Aksumite architecture, such as the distinctive frames of their windows and doors, as well as their square-sectioned pillars, usually adorned with bevelled corners and sometimes with stepped capitals.¹⁸⁵ Aksumite affinities have been identified by Phillipson at other churches in Təgray, such as Zarema Giyorgis, Mikaʾel Däbrä Sälam, and Čärqos Agobo, which are roughly contemporary with the hypogaeum churches.¹⁸⁶ In some early medieval churches in northern Ethiopia, artistic motifs of Arabo-Islamic origin have been noted, providing further evidence of contact with the Islamic world.¹⁸⁷ In terms of the skill with which they are executed, these structures compare favourably with contemporary churches in Nubia. Thus, while we might not have an Ethiopian Merkurios or a Kyriakos to whom we can point during this period, we do have indirect evidence of a regime—or perhaps several regimes—that had the means to commission fine architecture. That such architecture emulates Aksumite prototypes suggests that the northern Ethiopian elite of the time, whether descended from that of Aksum or not, wished to preserve something of the glory that was Aksum. Emulating Aksumite styles might also have been a means by which this elite sought to forge a link with the past and thereby achieve political legitimacy. Here one should note an important contrast with Nubia, which had no pre-medieval Christian past worthy of the name to turn to for inspiration. Other continuities with the Aksumite past are revealed by text-critical studies of medieval Ethiopian literature, which indicate the preservation of a number of Christian texts originally translated from Greek into Gəʿəz during the Aksumite period.¹⁸⁸ In view of the gap of roughly six centuries between that period and the upsurge in scribal production in the thirteenth century, one can only assume that there were institutions, along with influential patrons to support them, that preserved this Aksumite heritage during the interim.

The question, then, is who was keeping this heritage alive. As in other early Christian societies, priests and monks were presumably the ones who maintained the scribal tradition, but with the support of which elite(s)? The first post-Aksumite polity about which anything substantial is known is that of the Zagʿe, an offshoot of the Cushitic-speaking Agāw people based in the northern highlands of Ethiopia. The Zagʿe kings ruled from ʾAdäfa near Lalibäla and controlled much of present-day Eritrea, as well as northern and central Ethiopia, and an area extending southwards to Lasta, Wag, and Damot, and

183 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 185.

184 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 92–98, 185.

185 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 185.

186 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 185–86.

187 Lepage, “Aksum et Lalibela,” 28–34.

188 Bausi, “Alexandrian Background”; Bausi, “Traditio Apostolica”; Bausi and Camplani, “Ethiopic Documents.”

westwards to Bägemdär.¹⁸⁹ Although there has been much disagreement among scholars as to when the Zagwe came to power, recent research suggests that this happened sometime in, or shortly before, the eleventh century.¹⁹⁰ This leaves us with a hiatus of several centuries following the fall of the Aksumite kingdom. Given the preservation of the Aksumite Christian literature and the continued construction of churches through pre-Zagwe times and into later centuries, one can assume that Christianity remained the religion of the regime(s) that ruled Ethiopia between the Aksumite and Zagwe periods. This would imply familiarity with both written Gəʿəz and Aksumite material culture. In addition to the inscription of the *ḥaḍānī* Dānəʿəl referred to above—for all the uncertainty as to its date—a gravestone of a woman from the village of Ham in Eritrea,¹⁹¹ written in Gəʿəz and dating from 873,¹⁹² substantiates the thesis of an unbroken Christian tradition throughout this period, for it quotes several passages, if at times only paraphrastically, from the Old and New Testaments.¹⁹³ Just how long after Aksum's demise Gəʿəz remained a spoken language is unknown. Even at the height of Aksum, Gəʿəz might well have been spoken only in the immediate vicinity of the royal capital, perhaps coexisting with the ancestors of today's Tigrinya and Tigre. As Cushitic speakers,¹⁹⁴ the Zagwe are unlikely to have maintained Gəʿəz as a spoken language, and by the time the Amhara kings came to power in 1270, Gəʿəz would have been a dead language for several centuries. However, like Christianity and many of the architectural traditions of early medieval Ethiopia, the use of Gəʿəz—if only in writing—constitutes one of the longest-lived inheritances from the Aksumite age.

While much work is needed to clarify the manner in which Ethiopians kept Aksumite tradition alive during the Early Middle Ages, describing this period of Ethiopian history as a “dark age” must be qualified. To be sure, “dark” is not an altogether inappropriate description given the obscurity surrounding Ethiopia's political history at this time, while the abandonment of most major Aksumite-period settlements indicates a decline of infrastructure and quite likely a demographic decline as well. However, in view of the continued construction of churches and, so it would seem, the preservation of Aksumite-period literature, there is reason to suppose that, during the Early Middle Ages, Ethiopia might not have lagged that far behind Nubia in terms of cultural achievement. Where it chiefly differed from Nubia was in its lack of substantial settlements, the peripatetic courts of medieval Ethiopia representing a strategy for managing resources that contrasts starkly with Nubia or, for that matter, Aksum. Given the continued construction of churches, including in regions well to the south of Aksum's former sphere of influence, one can also posit a continued spread of Christianity during the Early Middle Ages.

189 Fiaccadori “Zagwe,” 107.

190 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 228.

191 Drewes and Schneider, “Les Inscriptions,” 324; Kropp, “Glücklich,” *passim*.

192 On the date, see Kropp, “Glücklich,” 168–70.

193 Kropp, “Glücklich,” 170–73.

194 On the language(s) spoken by the Zagwe, see Lusini, “Linguistic Transitions,” 269.

Conclusion

The fact that Nubia and Ethiopia followed two different trajectories during the transition from late antiquity to the Middle Ages serves to highlight the cultural and historical disparity between these two regions, for all their geographical proximity. It also serves as a reminder that one must be wary of casually lumping together regions under broad terms like “Northeast Africa” without considering the diversity of historical experiences that exist among the constituent elements of such regions. In this chapter, the case has been made that historical trends during the Early Middle Ages affected Nubia and Ethiopia in different ways. If one were to summarize the history of this period as it pertains to these two regions, one might say that Nubia had entered a new golden age, while Ethiopia, having already enjoyed a golden age during late antiquity, entered a period of obscurity. To put this another way, early medieval Nubia had reached the stage at which Ethiopia had been in the sixth century: a confident Christian civilization which had triumphed over its enemies and demonstrated its power abroad. Seen from this perspective, such eighth-century Nubian kings as Merkurios and Kyriakos were not only New Constantines but also—and perhaps more appropriately in the context of this chapter—new Kālēbs. By comparison with Aksum, more specifically Aksum during the first quarter of the sixth century, early medieval Ethiopia might seem like a country in decline, and there is indeed some justification for this view. Given the efforts by Ethiopians to preserve the heritage of Aksum, however, one must be wary of casually bandying about terms like “dark age” in reference to early medieval Ethiopia without some qualification.

Looking beyond the Early Middle Ages, one is struck by the growing disparity between Nubia and Ethiopia in later centuries. Although Ethiopia experienced a decline—though by no means a true “dark age”—during the post-Aksumite period, it began a period of recovery around the eleventh century and, by the time the Amhara came to power in 1270, it experienced a cultural renaissance that produced much of the art, architecture, and literature for which medieval Ethiopia is justly famous.¹⁹⁵ By that time, Gəʿəz, the lingua franca of Aksum, had long ceased to be a spoken language but, as the liturgical language of the Ethiopian church, it retained its cultural and ideological importance and remained, almost exclusively, the medium for all Ethiopian Christian literature down to the seventeenth century. This revival is responsible in no small part for Ethiopia’s ability to preserve its Christianity such that, even with the Islamization of many of the peoples living along its eastern fringes—less so in the highlands of the interior—during the Middle Ages,¹⁹⁶ it has remained a predominantly Christian country down to the present. Not so Nubia, where the collapse of the Christian kingdoms led ultimately to the withering away and eventual extinction of Christianity on the Middle Nile. The decline of Nubian Christianity began with the gradual reduction of Makouria to vassal status by the Mamlūks during the late thirteenth century, followed by the Mamlūks’ appointment,

195 Though dated in its presentation of Aksumite and pre-Aksumite history, Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, remains a useful source on the history of medieval Ethiopia under the Amhara kings. For a briefer account of the rise of the Amhara regime, see Tadesse Tamrat, “Ethiopia,” 123–34.

196 Tadesse Tamrat, “Ethiopia,” 134–50.

in 1315, of a Nubian convert to Islam as a puppet ruler. The process of Islamization was further accelerated by the conquest of Alodia by the Muslim Funj dynasty at the turn of the sixteenth century.¹⁹⁷ Although some vestigial Christian Nubian communities appear to have survived as late as the eighteenth century,¹⁹⁸ the death of Nubian Christianity was absolute, and while the spread of Islam was as long and slow a process as Christianization had been,¹⁹⁹ Nubian society emerged therefrom as one of the most thoroughly Islamicized in the world.²⁰⁰ In contrast to Gə'əz, Nubian has managed to survive as a spoken language, even if, with Islamization, Arabic came to replace it as the written language and, in places, as the spoken language as well. If one living in the sixth century could never have imagined how significantly the historical experiences of Nubia and Ethiopia would differ in the eighth century, one living in the eighth century would have been equally incredulous that Nubian Christianity could have a fate so drastically different from that of Ethiopian Christianity. The study of the histories of Nubia and Ethiopia during the Early Middle Ages is thus a study of contrasts.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Giovanni Ruffini, Pierluigi Piovaneli, Wolbert G. C. Smidt, and the anonymous peer reviewer for reading and commenting on this chapter. Any shortcomings are the author's.

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197 On the collapse of the Christian kingdoms of Nubia, see Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 242–55; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 136–48, 148–50, 152, 169–77.

198 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 256; Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 155–56.

199 Werner, *Christentum in Nubien*, 155–56.

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SAHARA AND WEST AFRICA

Sonja Magnavita

Introduction

The Early Middle Ages was a period of important socio-economic and political transformations in many parts of the ancient world, and the Sahara and sub-Saharan West Africa are no exceptions. Indeed, the changes and interactions taking place in the wider region between the seventh and ninth centuries were so crucial that their effects are still felt today. Mainly responsible for these developments was the Arab-Islamic conquest of Egypt and the Maghreb between the mid seventh and early eighth centuries. This is a period of fundamental cultural renewal that brought new ideologies, customs, technologies, architecture, and more, in tow of newcomers keen to profit from emerging economic opportunities. The Arab-Islamic conquest of northern Africa had a lasting effect not only on the regions directly affected by the invasions. From the eighth century onwards, Central Saharan communities and, with little delay, those living further south at the fringes of the desert also started experiencing the profound impacts triggered by the socio-political changes further north.

For the Garamantian kingdom in the Libyan Sahara, having flourished for almost 1,000 years, the three centuries preceding the Arab conquest of North Africa seem to have been a period of gradual decline. More and more settlements were abandoned, and the flux of trade goods decreased.¹ Perhaps the political and economic instabilities occurring further north due to the decline of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the Vandal interregnum in the fifth century, and the Byzantines' takeover in the sixth century had a negative effect on the then firmly established urban way of life of the Garamantes. After the arrival of the Arabs in the Libyan Sahara, however, towns were expanded or newly founded, and trade revived. A good example of this process is the town of Zawila at the eastern edge of the Murzuq sand basin in Libya, replacing in its political and commercial importance the ancient capital of the Garamantian empire, Garama (Jarma), from around the eighth century onwards.²

The decline experienced by the Garamantian kingdom between the fourth and seventh centuries finds, however, no evident parallel to the south of the Sahara. Quite conversely, settlements and their economies seem to have boomed in sub-Saharan West Africa around the mid first millennium CE, many of which faced a particularly

1 Mattingly et al., "Origins and Development."

2 Mattingly et al., "Origins and Development."

prosperous and stable period between the fourth and ninth centuries.³ It is during this period that the empire of Ghana arose, urbanism accelerated, and interregional interaction including trade gained considerable momentum. In view of the Arab-Islamic activities in the Central Sahara, a significant increase in foreign commodities can be noted in the archaeological record of sub-Saharan West Africa from the last quarter of the first millennium CE onwards. It is likely that the integration of regular trans-Saharan connections into a pre-existing network of interregional exchanges was facilitated and probably accelerated by ongoing processes of economic growth and state formation. In reciprocal fashion, the expansion of trade networks certainly had implications for the economies, polities, and societies south of the Sahara, though the nature and significance of such impacts are chronologically and spatially quite variable.

A major problem with comparative studies of inner African archaeological data with other world regions, especially the Mediterranean and Near East, is that African chronologies and in particular those of sub-Saharan Africa largely depend on radiocarbon or other physical dating methods, since alternatives such as dendrochronology, numismatics, and inscriptions are often unavailable. Overall, the level of precision of the radiocarbon dates usually ranges from just below 100 years to a few hundreds; radiocarbon results obtained before the 1990s especially show only very broad ranges, due to the large standard deviations.⁴ The reader must thus be aware that such data are not fully compliant with historical chronology; therefore, when in the following text age ranges are given, it must be clear that no further precision is possible within that range.

Trans-Saharan Contacts in the Early Middle Ages

The Saharan desert is often seen as a barrier largely preventing communication with adjacent regions rather than promoting it. However, just like the Mediterranean Sea in the Early Middle Ages, the Sahara was regularly crossed, and the long-distance connectivity potential can be regarded as high. If we keep this “Braudelian” image of the Sahara as a surmountable sea, then two preconditions are most important for undertaking successful crossings: suitable vehicles and routes suitable for those vehicles.

Prerequisites for Contacts and Trade

In the Early Middle Ages, the Sahara was as dry as we know it today, and any movements within and across the desert were thus highly dependent on provisions of water. Communication was hence much facilitated along lines of halting places where access to water was granted—primarily oases, water points, and wells. Depending on which vehicle is chosen to travel within and across the Sahara, the distance between water-provision stops has to be shorter or may be longer. In the Central Sahara and at its

³ See, for example, Connah, *Three Thousand Years*; McIntosh and McIntosh, “Early City”; McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger*.

⁴ See Wright, “Accuracy vs. Precision,” for a recent review of radiocarbon dating in African archaeology.

fringes, the most satisfactory cost–benefit ratio was certainly achieved by the use of dromedaries for long-distance travels and transports. Capable of bridging longer stages between watering places and, if necessary, carrying heavier loads than other transport animals, dromedaries were in most areas the first vehicle of choice for Saharan and trans-Saharan travels.

Dromedaries, horses, and donkeys were all domesticated outside of Africa; in the period concerned here, dromedaries were already in use in Africa for several hundreds of years: they reached sub-Saharan West Africa no later than the third or fourth centuries, but were likely present in the Central Sahara already around the beginning of the Common Era,⁵ and, possibly, even several centuries earlier in the Nile valley.⁶ In the Sahara and across North Africa, horses and donkeys were already used at least half a millennium earlier than dromedaries, and overland travel in these regions first developed within the limits of these transport animals' abilities. South of the Sahara, however, it seems that neither horses nor donkeys have preceded the arrival of camels—all were relatively latecomers of the first millennium CE.⁷ Prior to this, long-distance travel in sub-Saharan Africa must have relied primarily on other means of locomotion—waterways were likely very important, and if travel by land included transport, then the areas linked by the regular movements of cattle nomads coming in touch with sedentary Sahelian millet farmers probably set the basic grid for early communication and exchange networks.

Long-Distance Routes and the Goods Evidently Traded along Them

Due to the widespread availability of pack animals, the main geographical pathways used in the early medieval Saharan trade and communication with North Africa and the Nile Valley were chains of oases or at least water places, while to the south of the Sahara, travel options were less restricted. A route into the Sahara already known to Herodotus in the fifth century BCE and still in use during the Arab-Islamic Saharan trade ran west from Egypt over the oases of Siwa and Awgila to the heartland of the Garamantes, the Fezzan in Libya. From there it went on from one oasis or water place to the next—if we believe Herodotus, as far west as the Atlantic coast. The first, almost complete Arab-Islamic crossing of the Sahara along identifiable waypoints we get know of is the religious-military campaign undertaken by the Muslim conqueror 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi in the mid seventh century, who is said to have reached with his army the Fezzan, proceeding as far south as the Kawar oases in Niger's Ténéré desert (see [Map 12](#)).⁸ This was perhaps also the first encounter of southern Saharan people with Islam, though more meaningful relations between immigrant Muslims and locals likely only started to develop when Ibadi Muslim Berber merchants settled down in the area. Savage places the first Ibadi presence in towns on the southern fringes of the Sahara in the mid eighth

⁵ MacDonald and MacDonald, "Domesticated Animals"; Mattingly et al., *Archaeology of Fazzan*.

⁶ Rowley-Conwy, "Camel in the Nile Valley."

⁷ MacDonald and MacDonald, "Domesticated Animals."

⁸ Vikor, *Oasis of Salt*.

century.⁹ The Kawar chain of oases is oriented north–south, leading in its prolongation to the oasis of Agadem and ultimately to the northern fringes of Lake Chad. Whether contacts existed between Kawar and the Lake Chad region already in the seventh or eighth century is, however, unknown. No written or archaeological sources tangibly testify such a link for this early period, although it would certainly represent one of the shortest and most feasible routes from the Fezzan into sub-Saharan Africa. However, the expedition of ‘Uqbah into Kawar is seen by some as a sign of the economic importance of this trans-Saharan route already in the seventh and previous centuries.¹⁰ Be that as it may, the earliest written testimony of a trade connection along this route is found about 200 years later, in a report by the geographer al-Ya’qūbī from the last quarter of the ninth century. In it, he states that the inhabitants of Zawila in the Fezzan were trading black slaves who had been captured from among the Zaghawa of the kingdom of Kanim and others, and brought in by the people of Kawar.¹¹ According to the same author, at this point in time both Zawila and Kawar were inhabited mostly by Islamized Berbers.¹² This late-ninth-century text provides us with the first notion of a trade in black slaves from the northern Chad Basin (“Zaghawa of Kanim”) via Kawar to Fezzan. Kanim (or Kanem), an early polity that emerged along the northern and eastern margins of Lake Chad at the end of the first millennium CE, has not yet been researched archaeologically in any detail.¹³ It was one of the earliest sub-Saharan states whose rulers embraced Islam (end of the eleventh century), in this case most likely triggered by continuous contacts with Muslim Berber merchants and scholars.

Beside its function as a slave route, the Kawar region also has another great economic advantage: the Kawar oases are known for the export of different kinds of salts (natron, alum, as well as edible salt)¹⁴—today particularly the town of Bilma is widely famous for its salt production. Along with dates (*Phoenix dactylifera*) grown in the oases, salt was an attractive commodity, traded in excess in historical times. While alum went perhaps primarily north, edible salt was a product much in demand in sub-Saharan Africa, where natural sources are largely lacking and substitutes (such as plant ashes) are less popular.¹⁵ In turn, food products (particularly millet from sedentary farmers further south) were traditionally traded against Kawar salt, and this might have been so already well before the early medieval period. Since no archaeological investigations have thus far been carried out at the Kawar oases, nor at Agadem or at the northern and eastern fringes of Lake Chad, material indications of links along this route are lacking.

As famous for salt production as the Kawar oases and Bilma is another salt-bearing spot in the Ténéré desert of Niger: the oasis of Fachi, about 150 kilometres southwest

9 Savage, “Berbers and Blacks,” 362.

10 See, for example, Lewicki, *Commerce Transsaharien*.

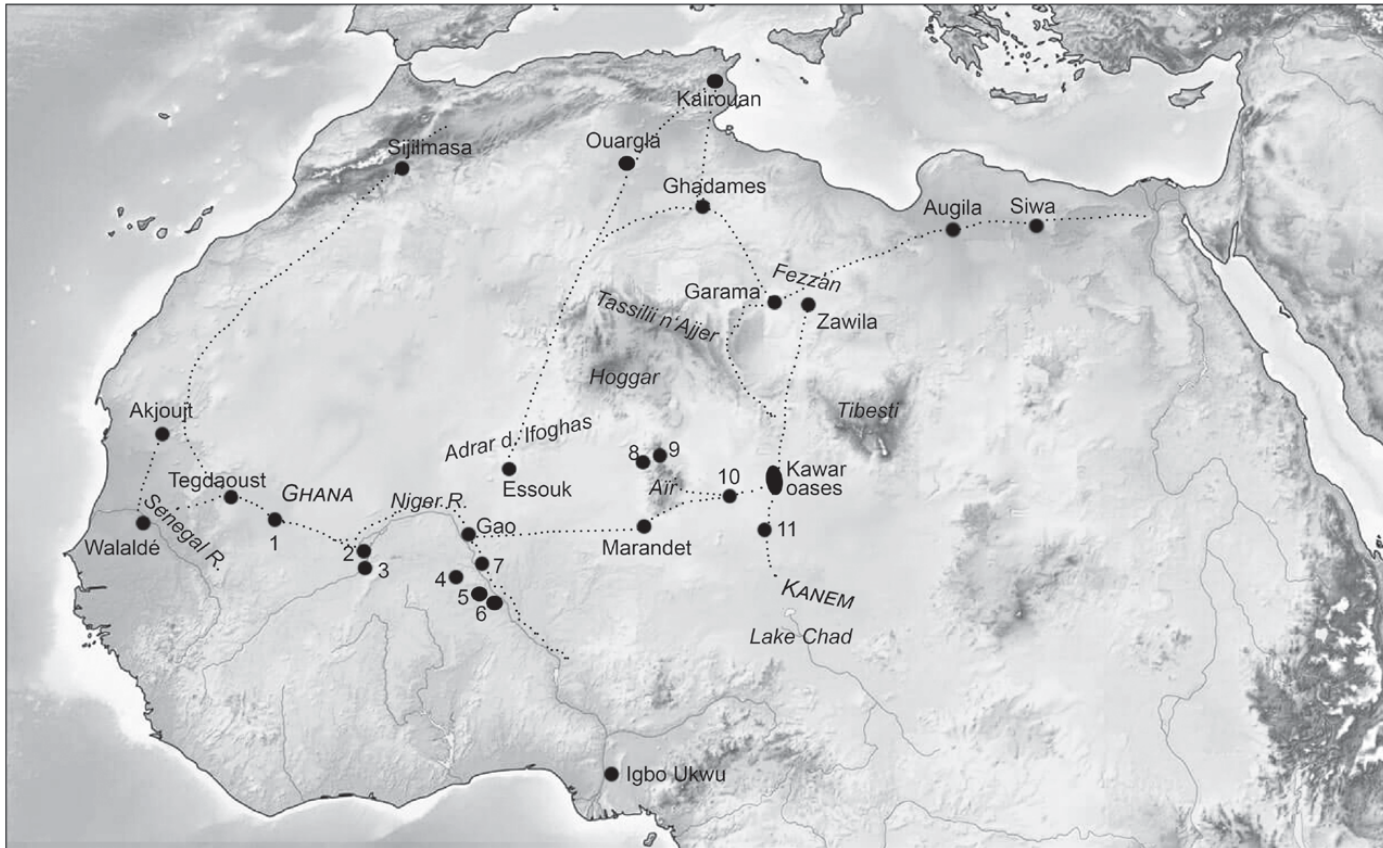
11 Levtzion and Hopkins, *Early Arabic Sources*, 21–22.

12 Levtzion and Hopkins, *Early Arabic Sources*, 22.

13 Magnavita and Sule, “Central Sudan and Sahel.”

14 Viktor, *Oasis of Salt*.

15 Viktor, *Oasis of Salt*.



Map 12. Sites, regions, and routes mentioned in Chapter 13: (1) Koumbi Saleh, Mauritania; (2) Lac Débo, Mali; (3) Djenné Jenou, Mali; (4) Kissi, Burkina Faso; (5) Bura Asinda-sikka, Niger; (6) Garbey Kourou, Niger; (7) Bentia/Koukiya, Mali; (8) Mammanet, Niger; (9) Iwelen, Niger; (10) Fachi, Niger; (11) Agadem, Niger (background: www.freeworldmaps.net).
 © Sonja Magnavita/www.freeworldmaps.net.

of Bilma. Located on a caravan trail linking Bilma with Agadez still in use today, Fachi figures as a prominent stop about halfway on its itinerary to the Air mountain range. Archaeological surveys have identified a number of Late Stone Age sites near Fachi, but the early medieval period has so far not been documented.¹⁶ Despite the paucity of direct evidence, a few archaeological sites within the Air massif and at its southern fringes testify that the regions bordering the Ténéré were well linked with each other during the period concerned here. At the sites of Mammanet and Iwelen in the northern part of the Air mountain range, the most compelling finds consist of human burials featuring well-preserved wool and cotton garments; radiocarbon dates for the two oldest of these textile-containing graves range from the mid seventh to the late tenth centuries.¹⁷ Both the style and weave, as well as the manner how the garments were worn by the deceased (e.g., a cotton veil worn by a woman in one grave, long tunics in both the woman's and a child's grave) suggests either a North African origin for the clothes, probably from an already Islamized area, or even that the deceased once professed Islam.¹⁸ The cotton garments provide so far the earliest archaeological evidence for cotton clothing in this part of Saharan West Africa. The introduction of domesticated cotton to sub-Saharan West Africa is thought to have been connected to the spread of Islam and the Arab-Islamic trade; although finds of woven textiles that are several centuries older than these do exist elsewhere in West Africa, those are made of wool, not cotton, and do not necessarily represent clothes but could be blankets or shrouds, for example.¹⁹ Apart from the above-mentioned burials in the northern Air, no indications for the spread of Muslim habits or traditions are known from the wider region prior to the early second millennium CE.

Located at the southern fringe of the Air mountain range, the site of Marandet bears tangible evidence of early medieval connections to northern Africa as well as to other distant regions within the Sahelian zone. Situated ca. 80 kilometres southwest of Agadez, the site is commonly thought to be the remains of a town of people known as *Maranda* from early Arab written sources, positioned on a route that once linked the West African kingdoms of Ghana and Kawkaw (Gao, at the eastern Niger Bend) with Egypt.²⁰ According to the Arab writer Ibn Hawqal, that route flourished up to the late ninth century when it got abandoned due to security reasons; in the subsequent centuries, a far more westerly route across the Sahara to the kingdom of Ghana via the towns of Sijilmasa and Awdaghust greatly gained in importance.²¹ Archaeological investigations at Marandet revealed a permanently settled site with trade connections to northern Africa through imported objects of glass, brass, and ceramic vessels.²² Stone beads made

16 Roset, "Néolithisation."

17 Grave MMNT.T.1.1 and grave WLN68.1; Paris "Sépultures d'Iwelen"; Paris, "Sépultures du Sahara nigérien."

18 Paris, "Sépultures du Sahara nigérien."

19 See Magnavita, "Oldest Textiles."

20 Grébénart, "Marandet"; Magnavita et al., "Studies on Marandet."

21 Ibn Hawqal in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Early Arabic Sources*, 45.

22 Magnavita et al., "Studies on Marandet."

of amazonite and carnelian, as well as date palm kernels (*Phoenix dactylifera*) found at the site, might point to contacts to some of the Saharan oases mentioned above. Apart from these goods, the most remarkable feature of the archaeological site is that copper alloys were once worked there on an almost industrial scale: the site is literally covered with small clay crucibles or fragments of such, used to melt both imported copper alloys and most likely also local copper ore, which is abundant in the southern Air. It seems that copper alloys processed at Marandet circulated widely within the Sahel; indeed, through archaeometric analyses, it could be shown that Marandet and contemporaneous sites at the eastern Niger Bend, about 800 kilometres away, were linked through a trade in these metals.²³ Radiocarbon dates place the heydays of this craft at Marandet into the sixth to ninth centuries. Likewise, dates from the consumption sites are confirming the flow of Marandet's products to the eastern Niger bend around the sixth and seventh centuries.²⁴

In the last quarter of the first millennium CE, the Niger river figured as an important communication and trade connection, linking cities such as Djenné Jenou with others further downstream along its course, like Gao (Kawkaw). Urban clusters such as Djenné Jenou and Gao, as well as sites in their broader rural hinterland, have delivered tangible material evidence for trans-Saharan as well as interregional West African trade in early medieval times: these include copper alloys,²⁵ glass beads, and, more rarely, glass vessels,²⁶ semi-precious stone beads,²⁷ cowries,²⁸ and wool textiles, as mentioned above.²⁹ The ruler of the kingdom of Kawkaw at the eastern Niger bend did not embrace Islam before the eleventh century, though a Muslim merchant community settled down near the kings' town at Gao/Kawkaw perhaps as early as the tenth century. The trade route from the Niger bend towards northern Africa mentioned above was certainly not the only one. North of Gao (Kawkaw) at the eastern Niger bend, the Tilemsi Valley leads into the southern Saharan Adrar des Ifoghas massif, where one of the most famous medieval market towns was situated: Essouk, the *Tadmekka* ("the Mekka-like") of historical accounts from the tenth century onwards.³⁰ At least in the eleventh century, as evidenced by the Arab geographer al-Bakrī, the town had links both to the Niger bend as well as to Kairouan, Ouargla, and Ghadamis in modern Tunisia and Libya.³¹ While it is not known since when these links existed, archaeological excavations at Essouk have shown that the town possibly started to develop already in the eighth century and was quickly

23 Fenn et al., "Contacts."

24 See Fenn et al., "Contacts"; Magnavita, "Sahelian Crossroads."

25 McIntosh, *Jenné-Jeno*; Insoll, *Islam, Archaeology and History*; Insoll, *Urbanism, Archaeology and Trade*; Fenn et al., "Contacts."

26 Brill, "Glasses from Jenné-Jeno"; Magnavita, "Sahelian Crossroads"; Robertshaw et al., "Beads from Kissi"; Cissé et al., "Gao Saney."

27 Magnavita, "Sahelian Crossroads"; MacDonald, "View from the South."

28 Togola, "Iron Age Occupation"; Magnavita, "Sahelian Crossroads."

29 Magnavita, "Oldest Textiles."

30 Ibn Hawqal in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Early Arabic Sources*, 46.

31 Levtzion and Hopkins, *Early Arabic Sources*, 85–87.

engaged in trans-Saharan trade.³² Luxury goods of the kinds mentioned above also circulated at Essouk;³³ in addition to these, there is unequivocal evidence of gold dust processing, and the production of coin blanks,³⁴ so far a truly unique find in western Africa. Radiocarbon dates place the earliest indication of such practice at the site between the ninth and eleventh century.³⁵ Both the interpretation of the finds and their dates are supported by al-Bakri's eleventh-century description of Tadmekka: in it, the geographer mentions the circulation of unstamped gold coins in the town. It has been argued that the gold used to produce these "coins" was brought to Essouk/Tadmekka from a standing trade connection with Gao/Kawkaw at the eastern Niger bend.³⁶ Downstream from Gao on the western side of the Niger river valley lay extensive gold fields, which might have been known already in early medieval times—the archaeological proof for this is, however, still lacking, let alone for earlier times. Many permanent and prosperous settlements of the first and early second millennium CE are known in this area, whose economies were principally based—like elsewhere in the Sahelian and Sudanic zone—on millet farming, small stock, fishing, and various crafts, particularly iron and pottery production. Early evidence for luxury imports across the Sahara has been made in this gold-rich area at the archaeological sites of Kissi, Bura Asinda-sikka, and Garbey Kourou, thus indirectly backing the hypothesis of lucrative commercial activities going on in this zone throughout the first millennium CE.³⁷ Whether these were connected to an early exploitation of the gold resources in their neighbourhood, or if the above-mentioned flourishing agriculture and crafts generated appreciable surpluses that led to accumulation of wealth among local elites, is a matter of debate.

Most of the material evidence of pre-ninth-century trans-Saharan contacts comes indeed from those sites and regions just described. The westernmost trade route across the Sahara, connecting Sijilmasa in the western Maghrib with Awdaghust and the kingdom of Ghana, only flourished from the ninth or even tenth century onwards. The archaeological record is quite in accordance with the historical descriptions, as the broader region northwest of the western Niger Bend as far as the Atlantic coast of Senegal and southern Mauritania has not delivered tangible evidence for regular interaction with the Maghrib prior to the tenth century, although abundant settlements of farming and iron-producing communities are known in this region too.³⁸ Nevertheless, shorter, Saharan–Sahelian networks of contact and exchange existed, even already well before the Early Middle Ages, as evidenced for example by copper items made of the southern Saharan Akjoujt copper ores in the first millennium BCE Senegal river valley settlement site of Walaldé.³⁹ Beside this, one can currently only speculate whether or not

32 Nixon et al., "New Light"; Nixon, "Essouk—Tadmekka."

33 Nixon, "Essouk—Tadmekka."

34 Nixon et al., "New Light."

35 Nixon, "Essouk—Tadmekka."

36 Nixon et al., "New Light."

37 Magnavita, *Wirtschaftsarchäologische Studien*.

38 McIntosh et al., *Search for Takrur*.

39 Deme and McIntosh, "Excavations at Walaldé"; McIntosh et al., *Search for Takrur*.

links also existed into the other direction, from west towards east or northeast Africa via the savannah.⁴⁰ More research is particularly needed in areas that are likely to have figured as crossroads between east and west, such as the broader region between Lake Chad and Sudan. So far, there are no indications whatsoever of contacts with regions farther south, such as from West Africa to southern Africa in early medieval times.

To sum up, between the seventh and ninth centuries, communication between Saharan and western Africa was primarily happening through overland travellers across the central portion of the desert. At that time, commerce was probably the prime mover for medium- and long-distance contacts. For the earlier part of this period, there is no reason to doubt that exchange and communication networks existed, given the archaeological evidence of long-distance contacts already prior to the eighth century. However, it is still unclear who the middlemen in these networks actually were. Until more evidence is available, one can only suggest that Saharan Berber groups—some of which were perhaps the ancestors of the present-day Tuareg—drawing on their long-standing skills in making the most of the desert's various resources, were interacting over considerable distances with people along the southern fringes of the desert. Products from the south were probably more in demand by the Saharan groups than vice versa, except perhaps what concerns the necessity of importing salt among sedentary Sahelian millet farmers. Unfortunately, the archaeological record provides us with a rather distorted picture of the nature and scale of these interactions: the vast majority of long-distance commodities were found in graves or other intentional deposits and are luxury and prestige items.⁴¹ Towards the end of the period, the picture of trade goods, routes and intermediaries is slightly less patchy thanks to an increase in the relative amount and content quality of written accounts. Commercial interests in the north were then seemingly much focused on slaves and gold, while sub-Saharan Africans were keen to receive glass, textiles, copper alloys, and finished metal products, beside the staple product salt. At least in the Central Sahara and Sahel, trans-Saharan trade was then most likely controlled by Ibadi Muslim traders including Islamized Berbers, who were likewise engaged in proselytizing activities in the urban milieu of the West African Sahel.⁴² Muslim merchants were present towards the end of the first millennium CE in towns such as Gao/Kawkaw, Tegdaoust/Aoudaghost and Essouk/Tadmekka. This strong relation between commercial and religious activities certainly paved the way for the great success and endurance of the Arab-Islamic trans-Saharan trade over the following centuries. The last two centuries of the first millennium CE can be seen as a crucial period when, on the one hand, supra-regional West African trade networks integrated more with the trans-Saharan

40 See, for example, Sutton, "Igbo-Ukwu."

41 Impressive examples of such accumulations of exotics are, among others, the eighth–eleventh-century burial and ritual deposits of Igbo Ukwu in South Nigeria (Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu*; Insoll and Shaw, "Gao and Igbo-Ukwu"); the pre-eighth-century burials of Kissi in north Burkina Faso; the third–eleventh-century burials of Bura Asinda-sikka in southwest Niger (Gado, "Village des morts"; Magnavita, "Trans-Saharan Contact"); intentional deposits at buildings at Gao Ancien in East Mali (perhaps seventh–tenth century, see Takezawa and Cissé, *Grands Empires*), and Tegdaoust in south-east Mauritania (ninth–eleventh century, see Robert, "Fouilles de Tegdaoust").

42 Lewicki, *Commerce Transsaharien*.

routes, and the Saharan trade became more connected with Mediterranean and West Asian world on the other, a process that had an irreversible impact on the wider zone.

Gold and Slaves

In medieval accounts on inner Africa, gold and slaves are certainly the most often-cited exports across the Sahara towards northern Africa. The first Arab geographers calling Ghana a “land of gold” were al-Fazārī and al-Ya’qūbī, writing in the early (al-Fazārī) and late (al-Ya’qūbī) ninth century.⁴³ Al-Ya’qūbī is also the earliest reference for a trade in black slaves across the Sahara, as outlined above. Archaeologically, the trans-Saharan slave trade remains so far largely elusive. Possibly, bio-archaeological and other natural scientific methods will bring some more light into this rather neglected field of studies in the future; promising lines of research could be provided for example by archaeogenetic⁴⁴ and isotopic studies.⁴⁵ So far, the archaeological contribution to the topic of a pre-ninth-century slave trade across the Sahara draws mainly on proxy data. In the Lake Chad area, settlement fortification was already an issue well before al-Ya’qūbī’s reference; large defensive villages with first urban traits can be traced back in the region even to the mid first millennium BCE.⁴⁶ Whether such security measures were a reaction of the local population to the threat imposed by putative slave raiders, or if other factors were at play, is a matter of debate.⁴⁷

Archaeological visibility is also a precarious issue when studying the African trade in gold. Finds of gold ingots at Tegdaoust/Awdaghust,⁴⁸ or, as at Essouk/Tadmekka,⁴⁹ of the utensils to produce such ingots, are extremely rare discoveries. They date approximately to the same time as the earliest Arab reports on West African gold but might also be much younger: at both locations, the contexts were radiocarbon dated and gave an age range between the ninth and eleventh centuries.⁵⁰ Be it in form of ingots or dust, the influx of gold into Mediterranean North Africa via the Sahara can also be traced archaeometrically.⁵¹ By testing characteristic trace elements in North African gold coins issued from the Byzantine period (seventh century) onwards, it could be shown that West African gold reached North African mints initially in the Aghlabid period (800–909 CE).⁵² As with the research on the slave trade, the integration of natural scientific methods into the overall debate is highly promising and opens new avenues for addressing questions such as when and where the African gold trade played a role.⁵³

43 For the problematic dating of Al-Fazari’s text, see Levtzion, “Ancient Ghana.”

44 See, for example, Harich et al., “Trans-Saharan Slave Trade.”

45 Magnavita and Magnavita, “All that Glitters.”

46 Magnavita et al., “Iron Age Beginnings.”

47 Lange, “Social Complexity”; Magnavita, “Oldest Textiles.”

48 Devisse, “Trade and Trade Routes.”

49 Nixon et al., “New Light.”

50 Robert, “Fouilles de Tegdaoust”; Nixon et al., “New Light.”

51 Magnavita and Magnavita, “All that Glitters.”

52 Roux and Guerra, “Monnaie Almoravide”; Guerra and Calligaro, “Gold Traces.”

53 Magnavita and Magnavita, “All that Glitters.”

Consequences of the Early Medieval Trans-Saharan Trade

The successful development of markets, trade, and urban life in the Central Sahara as well as south of it is very probably not a phenomenon that took its start in the Early Middle Ages. Instead, the roots of these processes can be traced back to at least the last centuries BCE.⁵⁴ In fact, the great success of early Islamic traders in quickly increasing the scale of trans-Saharan trade can be explained by the fact that the necessary infrastructure for organized commercial activities of all sorts was already in existence upon their arrival in the late first millennium CE. Nevertheless, the increase in the scale of trans-Saharan activities and the arrival of Islamic culture in Saharan and western Africa undeniably had lasting impacts on the communities coming in touch with it.

For historians and archaeologists alike, most of these impacts become visible only from the very end of the first millennium CE onwards, that is, beyond the period concerned here. These are, for example, the implementation of foreign architectural traits such as fired-brick technology into local building traditions, albeit largely limited to elite constructions such as palaces and mosques. The adoption of Arabic writing is another achievement due to the arrival of Islamic culture in western Africa. While Tifinagh writing was already present in the Central Sahara since the first millennium BCE, it did not become generally accepted south of the Sahara, and the few Tifinagh inscriptions known at the southern fringes of the Sahara bear no dates. Contrary to that, the Arabic writing system was in use at Essouk/Tadmekka by the early eleventh century and at Gao/Kawkaw by the mid eleventh century, as evidenced by rock inscriptions and epitaphs that bear calendar dates. Further evidence from elsewhere along the Niger river in Mali is only slightly younger: a rock inscription at Lake Débo, with a date expression of 454 AH/1075 CE,⁵⁵ stone epitaphs at Bentia/Koukiya, with dates starting in the last quarter of the twelfth century.⁵⁶ Coupled with these early writings in western Africa is the Islamic calendaric computation in years of the Hijra. Possibly also the measurement of weights in western Africa has been exceedingly influenced by the Arab-Islamic trade. Fatimid glass weights were found at several of the early medieval trading towns, Tegdaoust/Awdaghust, Koumbi Saleh, and Gao, most of which bear dates of between the mid tenth and eleventh centuries.⁵⁷ The Islamic weight standard system based on the *mithqal* (weighing between ca. 4.25 and 4.72 grams, depending on region and period) then permeated deeper into the West African interior, even where Islam otherwise played no larger role.⁵⁸ Whether monetarization equally took place around the same time is a point of debate; moulds to produce coin-like gold ingots—possibly the unstamped coins referred to in al-Bakri's eleventh-century report—have been found in ninth- to eleventh-century contexts at Essouk/Tadmekka, as mentioned above. At the present stage of research, it seems that such types of coinage were rather an exception

54 McIntosh and McIntosh, "Early City"; McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger*; Mattingly, *Garamantes of Fazzan*; Mattingly and Sterry, "The Origins and Development."

55 Marchi, "Peintures rupestres," 83.

56 Moraes Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions*, xxxiii–iv.

57 Devisse, "Trade and Trade Routes"; Devisse, "L'Or."

58 See Garrard, "Myth and Metrology."

than the rule. Other monetary forms seem to have been more widespread in early second millennium CE West Africa, and their coming up can perhaps be seen as a side effect triggered by early trans-Saharan trade: pieces of Saharan rock salt, strips of cotton cloth produced in the well-watered areas south of the Sahara, as well as copper alloy ingots in various forms, circulated not only in towns but also in the more remote hinterland. While a trade in copper alloys can be traced archaeologically back to at least the mid first millennium CE,⁵⁹ their use as a form of currency, as well as that of the cloth strips, only finds its confirmation in al-Bakri's eleventh-century report.

The establishment of regular trans-Saharan links and an overall increase in long-distance trading activities during the Early Middle Ages likely had further consequences for the involved communities. One of the side effects currently under discussion is the possibility that epidemics, including deadly diseases such as the plague, spread quickly.⁶⁰ These might have reached Saharan and western Africa (or, vice versa, northern Africa and Egypt) via foreign travellers or infested commodities, such as, for example, imported textiles infested by insects transmitting the pathogens. Bio-archaeological research is currently being carried out to verify whether deadly pathogens can be detected in medieval African skeletons.⁶¹

To conclude, it is undeniable that the expansion of Islam across the Sahara into sub-Saharan Africa in the centuries following the Arab-Islamic conquest of Northern Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries had wide-ranging effects on the people coming in touch with it. This process led to a slow change in religious beliefs and habits in western Africa and the Sahara. However, more noticeable was probably the opening of the markets with a significantly increased flow of trade goods across the Sahara compared to the pre-Arabic period, especially during the seventh and eighth centuries. The greatest challenge for studies concerned with early trans-Saharan trade is, however, the low archaeological visibility of several of the most intensively trafficked commodities across the desert: gold and slaves, salt and textiles. This scarcity certainly obscures many aspects around this trade and its impact. It is hoped that the increasingly frequent application of new research methods and technologies in African archaeology will help to overcome these problems.

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⁵⁹ Fenn et al., "Contacts"; Magnavita, "Track and Trace."

⁶⁰ See, for example, Chouin and DeCorse, "Prelude to the Atlantic Trade."

⁶¹ G. Chouin, personal communication; see also Green, "Taking Pandemic Seriously."

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Chapter 14

WESTERN EUROPE

Jennifer R. Davis

Charlemagne's Empire in Global Perspective "A Great Wealth of Gold, Silver, and Even Gems"

[Charlemagne] was so deeply committed to assisting the poor spontaneously with charity ... that he not only made the effort to give alms in his own land and kingdom, but even overseas in Syria, Egypt, and Africa. When he learned that the Christians in Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Carthage were living in poverty, he was moved by their impoverished condition and used to send money ... He loved the church of St-Peter the Apostle in Rome more than all the other sacred and venerable places and showered its altars with a great wealth of gold, silver, and even gems. He [also] sent a vast number of gifts to the popes.¹

This evocative passage,² taken from a contemporary³ biography of Charlemagne (r. 768–814 CE), illuminates two key features of Charlemagne's empire. First, it illustrates connections between the Franks and the world around them, showing us a Carolingian polity with a wide, if not directly global, range of vision. Second, the passage, almost casually, intimates to us the great wealth Charlemagne had available to him to make possible such elaborate acts of generosity. Other evidence suggests that Einhard, while he

1 Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, chap. 27, 31–32: "Circa pauperes sustentandos et gratuitam liberalitatem, quam Greci eleimosinam vocant, devotissimus, ut qui non in patria solum et in suo regno id facere curaverit, verum trans maria in Syriam et Aegyptum atque Africam, Hierosolimis, Alexandriae atque Cartagini, ubi Christianos in paupertate vivere conpererat, penuriae illorum conpatiens pecuniam mittere solebat. ... Colebat prae ceteris sacris et venerabilibus locis apud Romam ecclesiam beati Petri apostoli; in cuius donaria magna vis pecuniae tam in auro quam in argento necnon et gemmis ab illo congesta est. Multa et innumera pontificibus munera missa." I cite the excellent translation in Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 33.

2 For its literary antecedents, see McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey*, 7. For its contribution to later legends about Charlemagne, see Latowsky, *Emperor*, especially chap. 1.

3 Einhard wrote after Charlemagne's death, but on the basis of long, personal acquaintance with the king. The biography was composed in the early ninth century, but the precise date has been deeply contested. There is an easily accessible overview of the dating question in Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, xviii–xxii. The fullest discussion is that of Tischler, *Vita Karoli*, 151–239. McKitterick and Innes' early dating has not been generally accepted, but seems to me possible: Innes and McKitterick, "Writing of History," 203–9. The primary sources used in this chapter are all roughly contemporary, but as most involve dating disputes of this kind, they will not be cited in the bibliography with exact years of composition.

overstated and got some details wrong, was not leading us astray. Michael McCormick has recently analysed a survey of religious institutions in the Holy Land compiled by Charlemagne's agents, men known as *missi*, in preparation for the sending of alms.⁴ McCormick has explored this remarkable document, which survives in a ninth-century rotulus (a parchment scroll), and its context, arguing that Charlemagne did indeed send gifts to the Holy Land, gifts that are also referred to in royal legislation.⁵ Moreover, the evidence of trade connections in the late eighth and early ninth centuries also makes clear the extent to which the Carolingians were in contact with the societies around them.⁶ Einhard's vision was long dismissed by scholars, who, working in a paradigm set by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, had tended to see the Carolingian empire as economically stagnant and isolated.⁷ But Pirenne was wrong, about the economic picture if not about the importance of contact with the Islamic world.⁸ Einhard was not misleading us when he insisted on Carolingian contacts with the East, though he here puts more emphasis on royal generosity to Christians elsewhere and less on what the Carolingians got from the East. We must not take Einhard entirely at his word: for instance, there is less evidence of such patronage of Christian communities in Africa or Egypt, but at least the links of charity to the Holy Land can be clearly substantiated via the documents noted above.⁹

Einhard's second point is even more obvious. That is, Charlemagne had wealth to distribute. This wealth may not have looked all that impressive to Charlemagne's contemporary Harūn al-Rashīd in Baghdad, but it was notable for the Franks.¹⁰ What we see during the reign of Charlemagne is evidence of the Franks disposing of wealth on a new scale.¹¹ I will give just a few examples to illustrate the point. The increase in literary production during this period is notable, and evident both in terms of the composition

4 McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey*.

5 *Capitularia regum Francorum* (henceforth *Capit.*) 1, no. 64, chap. 18, 154: "De elemosina mittenda ad Hierusalem propter aecclesias Dei restaurandas."

6 McCormick, *European Economy*, is central here; we will return to the theme below.

7 Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (originally 1937). Despite the many errors in Pirenne's work, his insight that East and West were linked retains its power; on Pirenne's continued significance in this regard, see, to give just one example, McCormick, *European Economy*, 797–98.

8 Assessments of Pirenne can be found, among many others, in Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*; McCormick, *European Economy*.

9 See also McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey*, 179–85; Borgolte, "Platz in der Globalgeschichte," 183; Borgolte, "Carlo Magno," 21. Compare Drews, "Mächte des Islam," 93–94, and Conant, "Anxieties of Violence," 13–14, who are inclined to take Einhard's comments on North Africa more seriously.

10 On the wealth disparity between East and West, see Robinson, "Fowden's First Millennium," 59. See also Preisler-Kapeller, "Global View." While I was not able to consult his new monograph, the English language introduction clearly notes Carolingian relative poverty and lack of centrality to the global Early Middle Ages.

11 While the Franks got richer in the Carolingian period, this development had deeper roots, as Francia had long had a notably wealthy aristocracy. See Wickham, *Framing*, for instance 145 or 805.

of new texts and in the copying of works of all kinds.¹² The change in manuscript production is enormous. If one counts all surviving manuscripts and fragments from the beginning of writing in Latin until the year 800, we have around 1,800 items. Manuscripts produced in the Carolingian empire in the ninth century total about 9,000 extant codices or fragments. The contrast is even sharper when we note that many of the 1,800 pre-800 works were copied in the eighth century, and arguably the late eighth century at that (that is, after the Carolingian takeover in 751 CE).¹³ Given the cost and effort required to prepare parchments and other materials for so many books, these figures are a reflection of both economic and intellectual change.¹⁴ This extensive process of copying in the Carolingian world has preserved for us much of our knowledge of the Latin texts composed in Antiquity.¹⁵ One could give many other examples of Carolingian cultural flourishing, ranging from the revival of court poetry, often composed by foreigners welcomed to the empire,¹⁶ to the re-emergence of ivory work.¹⁷ All of these developments are signs of the Franks beginning to operate, in terms of cultural expenditures, on a new level.¹⁸ This picture of Francia, of a society in contact with the world around it, open to new ideas and new peoples, and graced with sufficient wealth to permit new cultural endeavors on a large scale, is what I seek to explore in this chapter.¹⁹ The openness and the wealth are connected, but not in a simple way. Yet thinking about them, and how they intertwine, will allow us a glimpse into how the emergent Carolingian empire fit into the world of the global Early Middle Ages.

Before we begin our analysis, a few definitions and limitations are necessary. I will focus in this chapter on the Carolingian world under Charlemagne. Using the frame of the reign of a particular individual to delimit the analysis of economic developments is

12 McKitterick, *Carolingian Culture*, offers a good overview.

13 For these figures, see Davis and McCormick, "Long Morning," 2.

14 McKitterick, *Written Word*, 138–48 on the cost of book production.

15 Reynolds, "Introduction."

16 There is a convenient overview in Garrison, "Emergence."

17 For this problem, and the possible link of Charlemagne's elephant, discussed below, to it, see Nees, "Charlemagne's Elephant." We possibly have a drawing of Charlemagne's elephant in an early ninth-century manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 2195, f. 9v; for the suggestion Bischoff, *Catalogue entry*, 213, for the date Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, part 3, 65. There are other Carolingian-era depictions of elephants: Hack, *Abul Abaz*, 61–62, with emphasis on the Bern Physiologus: Bern, Bergerbibliothek, Cod. 318, f. 19r and v with description in Koehler and Mutherich, *Karolingischen Miniaturen*, 172–82, and tables 121 and 122 (dated by Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, part 1, 122, to the second third of the ninth century).

18 An easy introduction to the extent of Carolingian cultural production can be found in the essays and exhibition catalogues marking the anniversary of the Paderborn meeting between Charlemagne and Pope Leo III in 799 and the anniversary of Charlemagne's death in 814: Stiegemann and Wemhoff, *Kunst und Kultur*; Pohle, *Karl der Grosse*.

19 Davis and McCormick, "Long Morning." See also McCormick, *European Economy*, 797, writing of the reign of Charlemagne: "Perhaps never again in its history would Europe be so culturally open, in so many directions, in so many ways."

inevitably an artificial exercise. I do so here for a few reasons. First of all, Charlemagne ruled for more than forty-five years, making his reign a not insignificant unit of time to analyse.²⁰ Second, his reign also saw the emergence of a plethora of new documentation that permits us to ask new questions and see more deeply into certain aspects of Frankish society.²¹ Third, it was Charlemagne who created the Carolingian empire as a territorial unit,²² through a series of dramatic conquests during the first half of his reign, establishing the Franks as a European power and a polity potentially capable of playing on a global field. Charlemagne of course cannot stand in for the entire early medieval (in Western terms) period covered in this volume. However, examining his reign in particular for evidence of global connections is justifiable because it represents a moment of change, in which the Carolingian economy took off and its global connections were arguably at their height. As Michael McCormick has written: “the pace of communications with the Muslim world accelerated precisely in the decades which marked the apex of Charlemagne’s rule.”²³ For these reasons, focusing on the period defined by a particular reign gives us a useful lens for analysis. Another qualification relates to the use of the term “global.” The connections I will explore here focus on Carolingian links to the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. One could easily argue that, as extensive as it was, the caliphate hardly equals the globe.²⁴ While true, I think using these connections to the caliphate to examine Carolingian interactions with global networks is warranted because they did open the Carolingian world to much broader influences and developments.²⁵ The connections to the caliphate were themselves mediated by other links, in particular to Byzantium.²⁶ But it was the ties to the caliphate that fostered the most significant connectivity between the Franks and the rest of the globe. The sources we have, written and material, allow us to see these Islamic connections most clearly, but they were an indirect link to wider networks as well.²⁷ As I will suggest in this essay, the Carolingians were

20 Which is not to say that the developments addressed here emerged out of nowhere. For some of the earlier roots, see McCormick, “Pippin III.”

21 For an introduction to the role of literacy in Charlemagne’s governance, see Nelson, “Literacy.”

22 As opposed to the bestowal of Charlemagne’s imperial title by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day, 800 CE.

23 McCormick, “Charlemagne and the Mediterranean World,” 210. See also Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*, for instance 108, on dramatic developments during this period.

24 I approach the topic differently, but there are some useful observations on the global context of Charlemagne’s reign, and the importance of the caliphate in assessing this, in Borgolte, “Platz in der Globalgeschichte”; Borgolte, “Carlo Magno”; Borgolte, “Ein Global Player.” I would like to thank Michael Borgolte for sharing copies of some of his articles with me.

25 On Chinese awareness of Charlemagne, mediated via the ‘Abbāsīds, see Hodges, “Shadow of Pirenne,” 109, 123.

26 I will not address ties to Byzantium further in this essay, but such links were important both on their own account and as conduits to a world further east. A convenient overview of Carolingian relations with Byzantium can be found in McCormick, “Byzantium and the West.” For the range of responses the Byzantines evoked in the Carolingians, see Wickham, “Ninth-Century Byzantium.”

27 For instance, Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*, 158. It is possible such links were mediated by the Jewish merchants known as Radhanites. However, the best evidence for these traders

very much on the periphery of the world of economic dynamism in the Early Middle Ages, but to the extent that they participated in it, they did so primarily via contacts with the ‘Abbāsīd world.²⁸

The evidence for Carolingian interaction with the Islamic world is fragmentary, and so is our evidence for Carolingian economic history (albeit less so than our evidence for global contacts).²⁹ Part of the reason for this is, of course, that we lack sources. Yet I would suggest that the fragmentary survival of evidence for international connections and for economic history is not just a matter of accidents of transmission, but also tells us something about the episodic, irregular, uneven nature of both Carolingian contacts with the world around them³⁰ and their efforts to shape their own economy. Recognizing this variable and fragmented character of the evidence, rather than attempting to explain it away, may give us a firmer sense of the Carolingian place in the world in the late eighth/early ninth centuries.³¹ In order to make this argument, I would like to look at a fragment of evidence on Carolingian economic management. The text I will examine is not about connections to the caliphate, at least not in any direct sense. Yet it has something to tell us about Carolingian economic frameworks, which can then offer us a model for thinking about how the Carolingians engaged, sporadically, with global networks.³² The model is transferable, both because economic contact with the East was becoming more important and because the same kind of occasional focus could have a large impact, in terms of economics and in terms of cultural contact. Using this text to develop a context for interpreting contact with the ‘Abbāsīd East will hopefully allow us to acknowledge the irregularity of the Carolingian evidence, yet also permit us to put our written and material sources into dialogue with each other and to begin to gauge how these irregular contacts and targeted management might have nonetheless had a significant impact on the Carolingian world. The analysis to be offered here does not add up to a coherent

comes from a late-ninth-century Arabic source, so whether we can read this back to the era of Charlemagne could be argued. For an overview of the evidence and its reliability, see McCormick, *European Economy*, 688–93.

28 I do not mean by this claim that the connections with the East were the most important internally to the Carolingian empire. Answering that question is arguably impossible but would in any case require a study far beyond the bounds of this one, and one that would necessitate extensive analysis of trade links, involving many kinds of goods, with places like Italy and Scandinavia. What we can say here is that the Carolingians’ strongest links to the global cultures explored in this volume went through the caliphate. See further note 25 above.

29 Despite, or arguably because, of these limitations in the evidence, both topics have prompted extensive bibliographies. In the confines of this companion, my references to these topics can be only highly selective.

30 For the irregularity of Carolingian diplomatic contact with the ‘Abbāsīds, see also Sénac, *Monde Carolingien*, 49.

31 We should also acknowledge that many of the changes that seem momentous to us may not have registered as such to contemporaries, particularly the mass of the population. See Bullough, *Age of Charlemagne*, 204, a reference I owe to Jinty Nelson.

32 Although economic and other forms of contact are linked: “the economic context is essential for any proper understanding of cultural communication.” Wickham, “Mediterranean around 800,” 162.

narrative: there are too many holes we cannot fill and too many aspects that we will not have space to address. Nonetheless, by allowing the fragmentary quality of the evidence to stand, we may be able to open some windows into the Carolingians' halting interactions with a much broader world around them.

From the Roman to the Carolingian Empire

Before we can narrow our focus to Carolingian–ʿAbbāsid connections and the Carolingian economy, something must be said about the wider context for understanding the early medieval West.³³ Charlemagne's coronation as emperor in Rome on Christmas Day, 800 CE, is one of the most famous events of early medieval Western history. But in fact it had little impact on his rule.³⁴ Its great fame stems partly from its consequences later in the Middle Ages, as one key factor shaping the complex and often contested relationship between the medieval papacy and the German empire. The coronation has also sparked interest because of the revival of empire, dormant since the supposed "fall" of Rome traditionally dated to 476 CE. This old idea that the deposition of the last Roman emperor in the West, Romulus Augustulus, in 476 CE had much significance as a historical dividing line has long been discarded. The weakening of imperial power in the West, the move east of key aspects of Roman society (whether people or wealth or objects), and the emergence of more local power-brokers had a long history that was not deeply impacted by the events of 476 CE. Rather than focusing on narratives of decline and fall, as set out so decisively by Edward Gibbon, modern historians are more interested in transformation, in seeing the period of Late Antiquity as one of creative shifts.³⁵ This new vision should not occlude the fact that much had changed in western Europe by around the year 500 CE. However, the recognition of longer processes of change have led historians to a more complex and convincing understanding of the Early Middle Ages, roughly the period from 500 to 1000 CE. This period is usefully seen as a post-Roman era, a time in which the political structure of the Roman empire in the West had disappeared, but in which Roman traditions in a range of contexts continued to be adapted, rejected, maintained, and, in short, continued to demand a response. It is this post-Roman West that was the context for the emergence of the Carolingian dynasty, what would become the first true hegemonic empire to replace the Roman in this region.

Historians no longer consider the Germanic peoples who moved into Roman territory in the fourth and fifth centuries as stable and static ethnic groups who brought a new Germanic culture to the Roman world. These peoples, although mostly speakers of Germanic languages, did not see themselves as any kind of Germanic whole and, rather than being pure foreigners, had typically long been in contact with Rome—its army, its

33 My short account here will focus on political and economic developments. Fuller accounts, with attention to cultural, social, and religious developments, can be found in, among many others, Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*; Smith, *Europe after Rome*; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*.

34 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 114–18; Davis, *Practice of Empire*, 350–64.

35 A change that owes much, particularly in the anglophone context, to Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*.

material culture, its religion. Most of the Germanic “tribes” were confederations of a range of peoples, who coalesced into political communities primarily on Roman territory and under the influence of Rome, in a process known as ethnogenesis.³⁶ These new communities, in their political aspects, became the building blocks of the post-Roman kingdoms, often called successor kingdoms, to highlight their continuing debt to Roman precedent.³⁷ The Franks were one of those so-called successor kingdoms. They coalesced as such in the second half of the fifth century, primarily in northern Gaul. The first Frankish leader we can begin to document with any kind of precision is Childeric, primarily known via the discovery of his tomb in modern Tournai.³⁸ His son Clovis has typically been seen as the real founder of the Frankish Merovingian dynasty, thanks largely to the extensive discussion of him in Gregory of Tours’ sixth-century books of *Histories*.³⁹ The Merovingian dynasty, through a combination of political skill, military conquest, and alliance with the Catholic bishops of Gaul, established what became the most successful of the successor kingdoms.⁴⁰ The dynasty was weakened by a succession of young kings, but their primary problem was an increasing inability to manage an upstart aristocratic family, known to historians as the Pippinid-Arnulfings, who dominated the office of mayor of the palace, a sort of prime minister to the Merovingian kings. The Pippinid-Arnulfing leader Charles Martel, who obtained his position, in good Merovingian style, by eliminating his family members who could serve as rivals, was so powerful that he ruled for a time without a Merovingian king on the throne.⁴¹ His sons Pippin and Carloman succeeded him as mayor, but strengthened their position by finding a Merovingian to reign as a figurehead king. After Carloman’s retirement to a monastic life,⁴² Pippin dominated the Franks alone before staging a coup that resulted in the deposition of the last of the Merovingians and Pippin’s election as king in 751 CE.

36 Prompted originally by the foundational study of Wenskus, *Stammesbildung*, the literature on ethnogenesis is now extensive. Some scholars believe that our later written sources provide glimpses of older Germanic kernels of tradition that were built into new ideas of ethnicity, such as Wolfram, *History of the Goths*. Others emphasize that the sources are too Roman to tell us much about any Germanic elements, such as Goffart, *Narrators*. Still others see ethnic designations as ways of making political and social points, almost entirely divorced from what we would consider actual ethnicity, as does Amory, *People and Identity*. But the precise nature and impact of ethnogenesis continues to be debated. Pohl and Reimitz, *Strategies of Distinction*, is essential reading, with references to further scholarship.

37 Useful orientation can be found in Goetz et al., *Regna and Gentes*.

38 A convenient overview of this famous burial can be found in Périn and Kazanski, “Das Grab Childerichs I.”

39 Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum X*, especially book 2. The extensive scholarly discussion of Gregory can now be easily accessed via the important analysis in Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, and his references.

40 An excellent survey of Merovingian history can be found in Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*.

41 Fouracre, *Charles Martel*, provides a useful overview of his reign.

42 On the complexities of this retirement and its consequences, see Jarnut, “Quierzy und Rom,” 267–70; and Becher, “Drogo.”

The pope anointed Pippin in 754 CE, part of an alliance with the papacy that was one of the foundations of the Carolingian dynasty, thereby sanctioning the coup.⁴³ The dynasty inaugurated by Pippin is what historians know as the Carolingians. This period of transition is difficult to study in detail, as the early Carolingians made a cottage industry out of condemning the later Merovingians.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, despite the opposition to the Carolingian takeover,⁴⁵ by the time Pippin died in 768 CE he was able to leave his kingdom to his sons: Charles, later known as Charlemagne (Charles the Great),⁴⁶ and Carloman. Conveniently for Charlemagne, Carloman died in 771 CE, leaving Charlemagne as the sole king of the Franks. Charlemagne spent roughly the first two decades of his long reign conquering much of the territory surrounding the kingdom he had inherited, and the next two figuring out what to do with it, a process of learning to rule that I have called the practice of empire.⁴⁷

The polity Charlemagne in essence recreated via his extensive conquests and the political shifts they prompted emerged in a moment of economic change and increased connectivity. If we return to the years around 500 CE and consider economic change, we have a rather different story to tell than the political narrative given above. This is because in the context of the economy, the vision of transformation embraced by many historians today does require some modification. We might not all choose to go quite so far as the archaeologist Bryan Ward-Perkins, whose book, entitled *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, makes his opinions immediately clear.⁴⁸ However, the fact that there was economic turmoil in the West cannot be avoided.⁴⁹ One reason for this is the extent to which the Roman economy was state-driven. Just how state-driven it was is contested among Roman historians, but the state undoubtedly had a strong effect on the economy. The primary economic drivers of the Roman state were the need to provision the army and to supply the imperial capitals with food. To move goods to meet these necessities, the Roman state accorded tax privileges to shippers and suppliers. One effect of this policy was to push other goods to the routes dictated by political needs. It was therefore possible to buy specialized goods, partly because it was economically feasible to move them along the paths worn by state-dictated movements. When this imperial fiscal system broke down during the fifth century, it effected commerce throughout the western Mediterranean, with imperial networks collapsing to be replaced by local, smaller-scale replacements. Whether we consider this a crisis, or a restructuring, it was a significant, systemic change in economic circulation and connectivity in the West. The Western economy only began to recover from the nadir in the mid eighth century, for

43 On this alliance, Angenendt, "Geistliche Bündnis," is essential.

44 Fouracre, "Long Shadow."

45 For instance, Busch, "Attentat zur Haft"; Richter, "Machtergreifung"; Wolfram, "Heilige Rupert."

46 On the development of this epithet, see Dutton, "KAROLVS MAGNVS," and Noble, "Greatness Contested."

47 Davis, *Practice of Empire*.

48 Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*.

49 This paragraph synthesizes McCormick, *European Economy*, and Wickham, *Framing*, and, in certain aspects, Ward-Perkins, *Fall of Rome*. All these works provide extensive further bibliography.

reasons we will examine below. Charlemagne's reign then falls at the pivotal moment when the West began to rebuild in economic terms, and when his conquests created a new form of European polity, interested in, but not defined by, Roman precedent. The ways in which this new polity intersected, occasionally and haltingly, with the wider world, via its ties to the caliphate, is our subject for the rest of this chapter.

Charlemagne's Elephant

The basic story of Carolingian connections to the caliphate has long been rehearsed, and has attracted further attention of late, with new studies seeking to put the developments of these societies side by side, if not always directly to compare them.⁵⁰ Given that the history of Carolingian–'Abbāsīd connections has frequently been told, I will make just a few points here, necessary to provide the scaffolding for the argument about occasional interactions with an outside impact.⁵¹ The story of the arrival of Abul Abaz in Frankish territory can encapsulate the key points we need to address.

In an entry included in the *Royal Frankish Annals* (a court history produced by the Carolingians), the anonymous annalist(s)⁵² reported: "On July 20 of this same year Isaac arrived with the elephant and the other presents sent by the Persian king, and he delivered them to the emperor at Aachen. The name⁵³ of the elephant was Abul Abaz."⁵⁴ Isaac

50 On the utility of this approach, see Nees, "Charlemagne's Elephant," 35–36. Recent examples of comparative work include: Dreußen et al., *Ex oriente*; Drews, *Karolinger und die Abbasiden; Kaiser und Kalifen*; Anderson, *Cosmos and Community*; Tor, *'Abbāsīd and Carolingian Empires*. On Drews, Maaik van Berkel's review is helpful.

51 For key summaries and interpretations, see Berschin, "Ost-West-Gesandtschaften"; Björkman, "Karl und der Islam"; Buckler, *Harunu'l-Rashid*; Musca, *Carlo Magno*; Sénac, *Monde Carolingien*; Treppe, "Zwischen Paderborn"; and particularly Borgolte, *Gesandtenaustausch*; with a focus on Jerusalem: Schmid, "Aachen und Jerusalem"; Bieberstein, "Gesandtenaustausch" (with interesting arguments about the impact on the city of Jerusalem itself); Kavvadas, *Jerusalem* (although I am not convinced by all his claims about Frankish impact in the caliphate). Much of the literature emphasizes the political and diplomatic concerns involving the Carolingians, Umayyad Spain, the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, the papacy, and the Byzantines. While such diplomatic relationships were of course important, my interpretation here will focus on economic issues, and on the 'Abbāsīd context.

52 The composition of the *Royal Frankish Annals* (*Annales regni Francorum*) involved multiple stages and multiple people, a process that has not yet been fully clarified. Discussion of the literature and the problems can be found in McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 27–54; Kaschke, *Reichsteilungen*, 173–77, 191–93, 277–83; Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, especially 335–45, 410–22.

53 The name as given in the *Annales regni Francorum* is clearly a corruption of the Arabic. For speculation about what it might have meant, see Dutton, "King of Beasts," 189–90; Hack, *Abul Abaz*, 31–32, 62–67. I will use the form "Abul Abaz" most often employed by Carolingian historians, as it is the form given by (some) manuscripts of the *Annales regni Francorum*.

54 *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 802, 117: "Ipsius anni mense Iulio, XIII. Kal. Aug., venit Isaac cum elefanto et ceteris muneribus, quae a rege Persarum missa sunt, et Aquisgrani omnia imperatori detulit; nomen elefanti erat Abul Abaz." I cite the translation in Scholz with Rogers, 82. Remembered, in transformed context, in Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, especially bk. 2, chaps. 8–9, 59–65.

the Jew was an otherwise unknown envoy sent by Charlemagne to Harūn al-Rashīd in 797 CE, who seems to have travelled for a time with messengers of a count seeking relics in Jerusalem.⁵⁵ During the course of the journey, his fellow messengers Lantfrid and Sigimund had both died, leaving Isaac to return alone with rich gifts from the East, most notably the elephant known as Abul Abaz.⁵⁶ Before reaching this entry for 802 CE, the *Royal Frankish Annals* had reported on the news of Isaac and Abul Abaz's impending arrival and the arrangements the emperor made to transport the elephant over the Alps to his new capital at Aachen.⁵⁷ Indeed, our annalist(s) made sure to inform their readers/listeners that Isaac had spent the winter of 801/802 CE in Vercelli, as he and Abul Abaz could not cross the Alps in the winter because of the snow.⁵⁸ Presents from the East, as indeed from elsewhere, were of great interest to court chroniclers keen to demonstrate Charlemagne's authority and prestige,⁵⁹ and this is hardly surprising in a

55 On Isaac: McCormick, *European Economy*, 678, 887; Heil, "Zwischen Nutzen," 39–41. For the count's messengers: *Miracula sancti Genesii*, chap. 2, 9–10; see McCormick, *European Economy*, 885–87. Note too that such royal and aristocratic contacts to the East piggyback on each other, part of the broader process of intertwining of diplomatic, religious, and trade connections explored by McCormick to draw a synthetic picture of communication in the Mediterranean.

56 *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 801, 114–16: "Ibi nuntiatur ei [that is, Charlemagne], legatos Aaron Amir al Mumminin regis Persarum [that is, Harūn al-Rashīd] portum Pisas intrasse. Quibus obviam mittens inter Vercellis et Eporeiam eos sibi fecit praesentari; unus enim ex eis erat Persa de Oriente, legatus regis Persarum,—nam duo fuerant—alter Sarracenus de Africa, legatus amirati Abraham, qui in confinio Africae in Fossato praesidebat. Qui Isaac Iudeum, quem imperator ante quadriennium ad regem Persarum cum Lantfrido et Sigimundo miserat, reversum cum magnis muneribus nuntiaverunt; nam Lantfridus ac Sigimundus ambo defuncti erant."

57 *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 801, 116: "Tum ille [Charlemagne] misit Ercanbaldum notarium in Liguriam ad classem parandam, qua elefans et ea, quae cum eo deferebantur, subveherentur." For different views on the logistics of moving the elephant, see Hodges, "Charlemagne's Elephant," 74; Hack, *Abul Abaz*, 24–27, and Nees, "Charlemagne's Elephant," 38. Out of a huge literature on Aachen, an excellent starting point is Nelson, "Aachen as a Place of Power." For the context of the elephant in Aachen, see also Hauck, "Tiergärten," 45–47; Heuschkel, "Aachener Tiergehege." On Carolingian participation in wider cultural expectations about rulership and animals, see too Goldberg, "Louis the Pious," 622–23.

58 *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 801, 116: "Ipsius anni mense Octobrio Isaac Iudeus de Africa cum elefanto regressus Portum Veneris intravit; et quia propter nives Alpes transire non potuit, in Vercellis hiemavit."

59 Einhard can again illustrate the Frankish position: Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, chap. 16, 19: "Cum Aaron [that is, Harūn al-Rashīd] rege Persarum, qui excepta India totum poene tenebat orientem, talem habuit in amicitia concordiam, ut is gratiam eius omnium, qui in toto orbe terrarum erant, regum ac principum amicitiae praeponeret solumque illum honore ac munificentia sibi colendum iudicaret. Ac proinde, cum legati eius, quos cum donariis ad sacratissimum Domini ac salvatoris nostri sepulchrum locumque resurrectionis miserat, ad eum venissent et ei domini sui voluntatem indicassent, non solum quae petebantur fieri permisit, sed etiam sacrum illum et salutarem locum, ut illius potestati adscriberetur, concessit; et revertentibus legatis suos adiungens inter vestes et aromata et ceteras orientalium terrarum opes ingentia illi dona direxit, cum ei ante paucos annos eum, quem tunc solum habebat, roganti mitteret elefantum." See also the *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 807, as cited in note 68.

gift-giving culture.⁶⁰ Abul Abaz, however, made a particular impression,⁶¹ with the court annalist(s) recording his death in 810 CE, during a campaign against the Danes, on which he had evidently accompanied Charlemagne.⁶² Clearly, Abul Abaz had a large impact on the Franks, strongly enough reflected in the contemporary sources that he is now the subject of his own modern biography.⁶³

The story of Abul Abaz is entertaining, but also has something to teach us.⁶⁴ A gift like this may have been of minor importance to the ‘Abbāsids,⁶⁵ but it meant a great deal to the Carolingians, both for the exotic quality of the gift as well as the indication of attention from the wealthy East⁶⁶ it signified.⁶⁷ These connections, however, were irregular, which is not to say they were entirely unpredictable. Certain issues, such as religious life in Jerusalem, helped prompt and structure diplomatic contact.⁶⁸ Yet these contacts were

60 There is a large literature on gifts in the Early Middle Ages. Orientation into the field can be found in Curta, “Gift Giving,” and Nelson “Introduction.” On Carolingian gift culture, particularly its international aspects, see Nelson, “Role of the Gift.” For the broader cultural context: Cutler, “Significant Gifts.” For some warnings about borrowing uncritically anthropological perspectives on gifts, see Moreland, “Concepts.”

61 Hack, *Abul Abaz*, 16.

62 *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 810, 131: “deinde transmissio Rheno flumine in loco, qui Lippeham vocatur, copias, quae nondum convenerant, statuit operiri; ubi dum aliquot dies moraretur, elefans ille, quem ei Aaron rex Sarracenorum miserat, subita morte perit.”

63 Hack, *Abul Abaz*.

64 For the complex meaning of animals, including the elephant, at Charlemagne’s court, see Dutton, “King of Beasts.”

65 On why an elephant in particular may have been sent, see Nees, “Charlemagne’s Elephant,” 37–38.

66 On Carolingian awareness of the wealth of the Arabic world, see Theodulf, *Ad iudices*, 498, especially lines 171–74 (with translation and discussion in McCormick, *European Economy*, 346):

Hic et cristallum et gemmas promittit Eoas,
Si faciam, alterius ut potiatur agris.
Iste gravi numero nummos fert divitis auri,
Quos Arabum sermo sive caracter arat.

While the coinage noted in the passage likely came from Umayyad Spain, the reference to gems reflects the connections the Carolingians made between wealth, luxury, and the East. Of course, this is also a long-standing trope in Latin poetry. I would like to thank Sandro La Barbera for discussing the passage with me.

67 An interpretation, however, that erroneously depicted the meaning of the gift to its senders; see Brubaker, “Elephant and the Ark,” for the general point about changing meaning of gifts, and 176 for Charlemagne’s elephant specifically. See also Dutton, “King of Beasts,” 61; Nelson, “Settings of the Gift,” 133–34; Nelson, “*Munera*,” 389. On the framing of the gift in terms of internal Frankish concerns in Carolingian historiography, see Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, 354–59. I would like to thank Antoine Borrut for his advice on this point.

68 For example, *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 807, 123–24: “Radbertus missus imperatoris, qui de Oriente revertebatur, defunctus est; et legatus regis Persarum nomine Abdella cum monachis de Hierusalem, qui legatione Thomae patriarchae fungebantur, quorum nomina fuere Georgius

occasional and of more relevance to the Franks than to their Eastern counterparts.⁶⁹ The aspects we have evidence for, unsurprisingly, are the parts that mattered internally to the Franks,⁷⁰ like the dispute over the introduction of the *filioque* clause in the Creed by monks in Jerusalem or the arrival of Abul Abaz, clearly one of the major attractions of the new capital at Aachen.⁷¹ Abul Abaz can thus encapsulate the context of Frankish–‘Abbāsīd interaction: periodic, prompted by certain, specific concerns, and with more significance for the Franks than the ‘Abbāsīds. This cultural and diplomatic framework will help us too as we think about more strictly economic connections.

et Felix,—hic Georgius est abba in monte Oliveti, et cui patria Germania est, qui etiam proprio vocatur nomine Egilbaldus,—ad imperatorem pervenerunt munera deferentes, quae praedictus rex imperatori miserat, id est papilionem et tentoria atrii vario colore facta mirae magnitudinis et pulchritudinis. Erant enim omnia bissina, tam tentoria quam et funes eorum, diversis tincta coloribus. Fuerunt praeterea munera praefati regis pallia sirica multa et preciosa et odores atque unguenta et balsamum; necnon et horologium ex auricalco arte mechanica mirifice compositum, in quo duodecim horarum cursus ad clepsidram vertebatur, cum totidem aereis pilulis, quae ad completionem horarum decidebant et casu suo subiectum sibi cimbalum tinnire faciebant, additis in eodem eiusdem numeri equitibus, qui per duodecim fenestras completis horis exiebant et impulsu egressionis suae totidem fenestras, quae prius erant apertae, claudebant; necnon et alia multa erant in ipso horologio, quae nunc enumerare longum est. Fuerunt praeterea inter praedicta munera candelabra duo ex auricalco mirae magnitudinis et proceritatis. Quae omnia Aquis palatio ad imperatorem delata sunt. Imperator legatum et monachos per aliquantum tempus secum retinens in Italiam direxit atque ibi eos tempus navigationis expectare iussit.” For the religious concerns that shaped contact with the East, see also Schmid, “Aachen und Jerusalem”; Borgolte, *Gesandtenaustausch*.

69 On the dangers of extrapolating from such occasional incidents, see also Wickham, “Islamic, Byzantine and Latin.” I would like to thank Chris Wickham for sharing his unpublished work with me.

70 The diplomatic contacts are ignored in Arabic sources. Compare Sénac, who suggests the silence might be due to ‘Abbāsīd desire not to harm relations with Byzantium or because the contacts may have been seen as inappropriate by Muslims: Sénac, *Monde Carolingien*, 43–44. Musca, *Carlo Magno*, 67–68, proposes that the contact was too normal to merit notice at the ‘Abbāsīd court, or that it might have been seen as problematic to exchange such envoys with Christians. Buckler offers some other possible reasons, including ‘Abbāsīd reticence to evoke the unsatisfactory (from their perspective) situation in Umayyad Spain: Buckler, *Harunu’l-Rashid*, 41–42. It seems to me more likely that contact with the West was not judged sufficiently important to garner much attention in the Islamic world. This interpretation is closest to that of Drews, “Mächte des Islam,” 87–88 and Bieberstein, “Gesandtenaustausch,” 153. Moreover, as Hack and Borgolte have noted, much of our information in Western sources was conditioned by the arrival of Abul Abaz, and the Franks’ great interest in the exotic animal: Hack, *Abul Abaz*, 44; Borgolte, *Gesandtenaustausch*, 36–37. Even from a Western perspective, without Abul Abaz, there would be far more significant holes in our knowledge.

71 *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 809, 129. On the *filioque* in the context of contact with the East, see McCormick, *Charlemagne’s Survey*, 168–70, 175–77. For the Frankish understanding of the issue, see *Konzil von Aachen*. For a full discussion of our sources on Abul Abaz, see Hack, *Abul Abaz*, 13–18, 31, 35–36, 73–78.

“Until Then They Had Seemed Almost Impoverished”⁷²

Noting the financial windfall attendant on the Frankish attacks on the Avars, Einhard rejoiced in the Franks' new-found wealth.⁷³ The wealth had far more complex sources than Einhard reports, but Einhard is right that Frankish wealth requires comment. Indeed, as context for framing economic connections with the East, we also need to say something about Carolingian economic history. Our understanding of the economic foundations of Carolingian power has expanded significantly in recent decades. The part of this literature I would like to consider here relates to the nature of Carolingian wealth.⁷⁴ As I noted at the start of this chapter, we have sources suggesting a significant increase in wealth under the early Carolingians. Where did this wealth come from?⁷⁵ In the Carolingian world, as in all pre-modern societies, the ultimate source of wealth was land. Recent research has clarified how land contributed to wealth. While some questions of course remain, we can now see more clearly the economic impact of multiple changes. These include increased exploitation of land, via the spread of technologies, even if older (such as water mills),⁷⁶ and more intensive efforts at recording and managing landholding.⁷⁷ Scholars have demonstrated that the classic bipartite estate form (of a lord's reserve and land tenures held by peasants) was not found everywhere,⁷⁸ but this structure and other new ways of organizing and exploiting land had a significant

72 The full passage is given in the note below. The translation is from Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier*, 24.

73 Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, chap. 13, 16, reports about the Frankish assault on the Avars: “Omnis pecunia et congesti ex longo tempore thesauri direpti sunt. Neque ullum bellum contra Francos exortum humana potest memoria recordari, quo illi magis ditati et opibus aucti sint. Quippe cum usque in id temporis poene pauperes viderentur, tantum auri et argenti in regia repertum, tot spolia pretiosa in proeliis sublata, ut merito credi possit hoc Francos Hunis [that is, the Avars] iuste eripuisse, quod Huni prius aliis gentibus iniuste eripuerunt.” See also the *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 796, 98: “Sed et Heiricus dux Foroiulensis missis hominibus suis cum Wonomyro Sclavo in Pannonias hringum gentis Avarorum longis retro temporibus quietum, civili bello fatigatis inter se principibus, spoliavit,—chagan sive iuguro intestina clade addictis et a suis occisis—thesaurum priscorum regum multa seculorum prolixitate collectum domno regi Carolo ad Aquis palatium misit. Quo accepto peracta Deo largitori omnium bonorum gratiarum actione idem vir prudentissimus atque largissimus et Dei dispensator magnam inde partem Romam ad limina apostolorum misit per Angilbertum dilectum abbatem suum; porro reliquam partem obtimatibus, clericis sive laicis, ceterisque fidelibus suis largitus est.”

74 Much of the literature to date has focused on the social meaning of wealth. To give just one example, see Devroey et al., *Élites*.

75 The importance of the question is also highlighted by Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*, especially 102–11.

76 Böhme, “Wassermühlen”; Lohrmann, “Moulin à Eau”; McCormick, *European Economy*, 10.

77 Nelson, “Literacy,” 273–77.

78 Indeed, one of the most important aspects of recent work has been to insist on diversity within the Carolingian empire. This synthetic sketch necessarily occludes some of the regional variations that were a key feature of the Carolingian economy.

effect on crop yields and productivity.⁷⁹ Another key insight has been the recognition that rather than being entirely self-sustaining entities, great estates, like those controlled by monasteries, were active participants in networks of exchange.⁸⁰ Assessments of economic growth also need to pay heed to environmental circumstances⁸¹ and changes in disease cultures.⁸² The balance between different factors has yet to be clarified, and possible differences between royal, ecclesiastical, and aristocratic landholding still need to be further explored. Nonetheless, the research done thus far does indicate an upturn in agricultural production, which clearly made more wealth available to the Carolingian dynasty, as well as to the elite at large.⁸³

Before we examine another major source of economic growth, namely trade, it is worth considering the effects of new wealth.⁸⁴ Other than lots of manuscripts and cultural production, what was the impact of economic development, or perhaps better put, economic complexity?⁸⁵ While I cannot offer a detailed discussion of this important topic here, there are two obvious factors that should be noted. The first of these is the political, broadly understood. The ambitious Carolingian effort to conquer much of western Europe and then change how it was ruled required extensive resources. As Chris Wickham has put it: "if one follows how much land aristocrats had, how it was exploited, and how such people related to the structures of political power, one can come to understand the entire kaleidoscope of not only economic, but also political, change in the Early Middle Ages."⁸⁶ How one gets from wealth to politics, to how societies are organized, is a multifaceted process that cannot be unpacked here, but that the wealth helped make possible the formation and functioning of the new Carolingian empire is worth stressing. The second factor is the impact of wealth on human life. In its simplest terms, more land under cultivation and/or land more fully cultivated means more food, which, ultimately, offers the possibility of improved health and demographic growth.⁸⁷ That such demographic growth was an essential aspect of European economic

79 For this sentence and the one following, the work of Adriaan Verhulst and Jean-Pierre Devroey has been essential; their collected articles of (*Rural and Urban Aspects* and *Études* respectively) offer excellent entry points, with further bibliography, into these issues of estate structure and economic function.

80 Lebecq, "Role of the Monasteries."

81 A path has been set by the pioneering study of McCormick et al., "Volcanoes."

82 Particularly the end of the Justinianic plague, on which see Little, *Plague*.

83 There is a sober and thoughtful assessment of just about all aspects of the problem in Verhulst, *Carolingian Economy*.

84 Depeyrot, *Richesse et Société*, offers a useful starting point.

85 For the teleologies implied in the idea of economic development, see Wickham, "Rethinking the Structure."

86 Wickham, "Rethinking the Structure," 30.

87 One must note that such improved food production and health need not imply an overall amelioration of the circumstances of the peasantry, as Carolingian economic expansion also resulted in increased aristocratic control, as is stressed by Wickham, "Rethinking the Structure," among others. Conversely, others see the early medieval period as a whole as one of greater peasant autonomy, which also had positive economic consequences. See, for instance, Henning, "Slavery or Freedom."

expansion in the central Middle Ages is generally accepted; the new work on Carolingian economic expansion suggests that this demographic growth may need to be dated far earlier than it has been.⁸⁸ Wealth, then, helped provide the wherewithal for the broader changes associated with the Carolingian period, and thus is both cause and consequence of increased contact with the East.

One context for such contact was trade. And, indeed, the other major source of wealth historians have stressed is the profit from trade. A new generation of scholarship, pre-eminently that of Michael McCormick and Chris Wickham, has demonstrated a significant revival of trade by the mid eighth century, surely not coincidentally the moment of the emergence of the Carolingian empire (as well as the 'Abbāsīd). But the McCormick and Wickham models do differ in important ways. McCormick focuses on long-distance trade,⁸⁹ particularly emphasizing contact with the caliphate, and argues that what the Carolingians had to offer that could attract Arab interest was primarily slaves.⁹⁰ Wickham provides an approximately similar dating for the economic upturn, but links it to regional networks powered by aristocratic demand, placing far less emphasis on long-distance trade.⁹¹

That economic growth in the Carolingian world was powered by a combination of improved agriculture, regional trading networks, and long-distance trade seems clear. Nor does the story stop there. While the economic importance of conquest, tribute, and plunder has been sometimes overestimated,⁹² the processes of Carolingian expansion did have some degree of economic consequences, evident in the glee apparent in Frankish sources at the arrival of the Avar treasure in Francia and cited at the start of this section. There were multiple different sources of new wealth in the Carolingian world. The debate about the balance between these factors will not be settled here, although developments related to land have to be assumed to have been primary. Let me make just a few points. That outside impetus, including from the caliphate, was one factor in Carolingian economic development is, to my mind, demonstrated by McCormick's research. This need not imply a significant scale of economic contact to be meaningful, as I will argue here. Indeed, some recent scholarship emphasizes the relative lack of integration between Western, Islamic, and Byzantine economic systems in the Early

88 This view is argued most strongly by Michael McCormick. See, for instance, McCormick, *European Economy*, 791–92: “The rise of the European commercial economy, indeed the rise of the European economy, period, did not begin in the tenth or eleventh century. It began, decisively, in the concluding decades of the eighth century. Internal forces brought the various regions of Europe to a point where demand for exotic goods could increase. Demographic growth, the expansion and stability of political structures, innovative methods of marshalling and compelling labour on the land and extracting its fruits—the story of water mills and the great estate—shifting cultural values and ambitions (including, probably for the first time since late antiquity, a small but positive trend toward literacy, and an application of literacy to land management), a currency which was solid and unified were essential elements of this turning point.”

89 McCormick, *European Economy*.

90 On slavery: McCormick, *European Economy*, chap. 25; McCormick, “New Light.”

91 Most fully set out in Wickham, *Framing*.

92 The key study remains Reuter, “Plunder and Tribute.”

Middle Ages.⁹³ Nonetheless, as the Western context was the most simple, it was also arguably the most easily effected by outside influences, however limited. The role of slavery is difficult to determine, because so much evidence for economic connection is archaeological, and documenting slavery archaeologically is very hard.⁹⁴ One could make the argument about increased trade, however, in terms of goods other than slaves.⁹⁵ Yet, for our purposes here, the precise balance between different types of economic stimuli and the exact nature of all trade contacts east and west do not need to be resolved. The necessary starting point for the consideration of economic management to follow is that the Carolingians were getting wealthier and that the East is one part of that story. Having returned full circle to Einhard's perspective that we began with, we can now turn to my fragment of evidence concerning economic management.

“About Merchants Who Go to the Regions of the Slavs and Avars”

We have obviously lost many, many documents from the Early Middle Ages. And economic records, which were by their nature often pragmatic, humble documents, and moreover often rapidly superseded, have no doubt been lost especially frequently.⁹⁶ The consequence of this reality is that our documentary basis for the study of economic history is particularly limited. And, indeed, in the case of the early Carolingians, our evidence is often tantalizing but also frustratingly fragmentary. To give just one example, a history of the abbots of the monastery of St Wandrille/Fontenelle notes the role played by one of its abbots in managing trade along the Channel coast.⁹⁷ That such “procurators” could be found elsewhere in the empire is highly likely, but we just do not know exactly where and when.⁹⁸ One could assume the existence of a carefully defined network, where each major economic centre had such an official. One could also argue that this was an exceptional case, not the tip of an iceberg of lost evidence for oversight of trade. I would like to propose here a middle-ground position, positing a group of people

93 Wickham, “Islamic, Byzantine and Latin.” The next sentence also depends on the work of Chris Wickham.

94 The literature on the archaeology of slavery has focused on the Roman period, when the extent of slave-holding is clear, although its chronology and economic impact are debated. For instance, see Fantress, “Selling People,” or Trümpter, *Slave Markets*. For an optimistic approach to finding slaves archaeologically in the Early Middle Ages, see Henning, “Strong Rulers.” More cautious is Fontaine, “Slave-Trading.” There are some useful indicators for the tenth century in Jankowiak, “Dirhams for Slaves.” (I would like to thank Chris Wickham for directing me to this article.) The extent to which slavery was a major factor in the early medieval West remains contested. See, most recently, Rio, *Slavery after Rome*, arguing for less slavery and a wider range of forms of “unfreedom.”

95 See further note 28 above.

96 Nelson, “Literacy,” 292.

97 *Gesta Abbatum Fontanellensium*, chap. 16, 46: “Hic nempe Gervoldus super regni negotia procurator constituitur per multos annos, per diversos portus ac civitates exigens tributa atque vectigalia, maxime in Quentawich.” *Emporia* like Quentovic were also a major part of the story of Carolingian economic expansion, but one that cannot be explored here.

98 Such overseers of trade are found in many times and places, and thus offer a profitable case for comparative study. For some indications of this, see Narotzky and Manzano, “Hisba.”

meant to engage with trade but recognizing that such groupings of people were not part of a fully consistent, unchanging, comprehensive network. Some places, at some times, had a procurator, but that need not imply that all economic nodes did, all the time, nor that all such procurators did exactly the same things. That is, some of the gaps in our evidence are not just loss of sources but reflect an approach to economic management that was somewhat irregular and that varied over time and space. I will make this argument by looking at one record of trade management that suggests even when we can see clear efforts at economic control, these were more often targeted and dynamic rather than consistent and comprehensive.⁹⁹

The example I would like to examine is a chapter from the Double Capitulary of Thionville, a royal law produced in 805 CE.¹⁰⁰ The passage in question states:

About the merchants who go to the regions of the Slavs and the Avars, to where they ought to proceed with their business: that is, in the regions of Saxony to Bardowick,¹⁰¹

99 One must be careful not to overstate the existence of economic policy in the Carolingian world. The most useful thing the Carolingian kings may have done economically is to *not* be too involved; see McCormick, “Frühmittelalterliche König.” See also the warnings of Verhulst, *Carolingian Economy*, 126–31. What I propose here, then, is royal (and aristocratic) attention to means of extracting resources, not a full-scale economic programme. For an argument for more conscious Carolingian manipulation of the economy in the context of ties to the East, see Hodges, “Charlemagne’s Elephant and the Beginnings.”

100 For general comment on this capitulary, see: Ganshof, *Recherches*, 73–74; Brunner, “Diedenhofener Kapitular”; Verhulst, “Diedenhofener Kapitular”; Hardt, “Diedenhofener Kapitular.” Michael Glatthaar’s very important recent study of the composition of this capitulary raises many questions, most of which cannot be addressed here. He offers a new dating of 805/806 that reflects a three-part process of composition and revision of the capitulary. I will continue to use the traditional date of 805, as I am not convinced by all aspects of this argument, although it makes an essential contribution to our understanding of the capitularies. See Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen.” This capitulary has frequently been drawn on in scholarship on the nature of the Carolingian frontiers. The discussion of the Eastern frontier has focused on the extent to which it was based on Roman precedent, involving a *limes* structure (supported by Hardt, “Hesse, Elbe, Saale,” 229–32; Hardt, “Linien und Säume,” 54, 56; Hardt, “Contra Magadaburg”; and critiqued by Schmauder, “Überlegungen”; Saile, *Slawen*, 185–86, a reference I owe to Kuba Kabala), and the chronology and nature of the emergence of the system of marches. While my argument about the nature of what was envisioned at Thionville has some relevance for the effort to understand the Carolingian frontier more broadly, I will not pursue this aspect of the question here. For the emergence of such frontier areas, see Wolfram, “Carolingian Frontier-System,” specifically 240–43 on the Capitulary of Thionville. On the slow development of the marches, see Stieldorf, *Marken und Markgrafen*, especially 1–108, 188–205, and 350–423.

101 On the locations involved, and the general import of the chapter, see Timme, “Scheeßel”; Hübener, “Orte des Diedenhofener”; Baur and Kirchberger, “Diedenhofener Kapitular”; Hardt, “Diedenhofener Kapitular”; Hardt, “Erfurt im Frühmittelalter”; Hardt, “Contra Magadaburg”; Hardt, “Magdeburg und die Ostgrenze”; Hardt, “Bardowick und Erfurt.” I would like to thank Matthias Hardt for sending me copies of a number of his articles and Heléna Tóth for helping me track down the Baur and Kirchberger article. See also Map 13. This map is based upon two GIS (Geographical

where Hredi should oversee [business]; and to *Schezla*,¹⁰² where Madalgaud should oversee; and to Magdeburg, Aito should oversee; and to Erfurt Madalgaud should oversee and to Hallstadt Madalgaud also should oversee; to Forcheim and to Pfreimt/Premberg¹⁰³ and to Regensburg Audulf should oversee, and to Lorch, Warner. And that they do not bring arms and *brunias*¹⁰⁴ to be sold; but if they should be found carrying [such arms], that all of their goods should be taken from them, and half should [go] to the palace, the other half should be divided between the abovementioned *missi* and the discoverers.¹⁰⁵

The passage claims to identify locations where merchants should come, each entrusted to a different royal agent (a *missus*, plural *missi*) and furthermore seeks to restrict the sale of weapons beyond the frontier.¹⁰⁶ This listing of control points might suggest that

Information Systems) shapefiles for boundaries of the Frankish kingdoms, one kindly provided by Johan Åhlfeldt of Lund University from his Regnum Francorum Online (francia.ahlfeldt.se), and another obtained from Ménestrel: Médiévistes sur le net (www.menestrel.fr/?-Ressources-&lang=en#2835), adapted with slight modifications by L. R. Poos, the Catholic University of America. The map freezes an expanding empire at one moment in time, and there are arguments to be made about multiple details. Nonetheless, it should offer a basic orientation to the major places mentioned in the text.

102 Given the lack of any certainty about where this place was, I leave it in the Latin and omit it from Map 13. For discussion, see Schmauder, “Überlegungen,” 65–66 and a useful map of proposed locations on 91; Timme, “Scheeßel”; Schneeweiß, “Neue Überlegungen.”

103 There is disagreement about this location, so I leave the question open here (both possibilities are indicated on Map 13). Several of the works cited in notes 101 and 102 examine the problem.

104 A form of armor; on this see Ziolkowski, “Of Arms,” 202–6; Coupland, “Carolingian Arms,” 38–42.

105 *Capit.* 1, no. 44, chap. 7, 123: “De negotiatoribus qui partibus Sclavorum et Avarorum pergunt, quousque procedere cum suis negotiis debeant: id est partibus Saxoniae usque ad Bardaenowic, ubi praevideat Hredi; et ad Schezla, ubi Madalguadus praevideat; et ad Magadoburg praevideat Aito; et ad Erpesfurt praevideat Madalguadus; et ad Halazstat praevideat item Madalgaudus; ad Foracheim et ad Breemberga et ad Ragenisburg praevideat Audulfus, et ad Lauriacum Warnarius. Et ut arma et brunias non ducant ad venundandum; quod si inventi fuerint portantes, ut omnis substantia eorum auferatur ab eis, dimidia quidem pars partibus palatii, alia vero medietas inter iamdictos missos et inventorum dividatur.” The translation is mine, but I have consulted King, *Charlemagne*, 248; Nelson, “Paradoxes of Power,” 35; and Loyn and Percival, *Reign of Charlemagne*, 88. I am also grateful to Sandro La Barbera for discussing the translation with me.

106 A desire to control weapons is a more general concern. See, for instance, *Capit.* 1, no. 74, chap. 10, 167: “Constitutum est, ut nullus episcopus aut abbas aut abbatisa vel quislibet rector aut custos aecclesiae bruniam vel gladium sine nostro permissu cuilibet homini extraneo aut dare aut venundare praesumat, nisi tantum vassallis suis. Et si evenerit, ut in qualibet ecclesia vel in sancto loco plures brunias habeat quam ad homines rectores eiusdem ecclesiae sufficiant, tunc principem idem rector ecclesiae interroget, quid de his fieri debeat.” For further prohibitions of the sale of arms outside the empire, see: *Capit.* 1, no. 20, chap. 20, 51: “De brunias, ut nullus foris nostro regno vendere praesumat.” *Capit.* 1, no. 40, chap. 7, 115: “Ut bauga et brunias non dentur negotiatoribus.” *Capit.* 1, no. 90, chap. 7, 190: “Ut nullus manicipia christiana vel pagana nec qualibet arma vel amissario foris regno nostro vendat; et qui hoc fecerit, bannum nostrum componere cogatur; et si ea mancipia minime revocare potuerit, widrigild suum componat.” Glatthaar observes that one of the three versions of the capitulary adds that weapons should not be sold “in those places.” He



Map 13. Charlemagne's empire.
© Lawrence R. Poos.

the capitulary was setting up a regular network for economic oversight. However, such an interpretation would overlook the contingency and dynamism of the arrangements envisioned. The capitulary is designating a region in which agents can extract resources without exerting full control over all merchants and their dealings. The mechanisms envisioned in fact leave room for a considerable degree of flexibility in terms of both people and places.

Let us begin with the geographical imagination of the text.¹⁰⁷ One has to assume that there were inducements to merchants to come to these places, in the form of markets, protection, and infrastructure, in addition to the threat of punishments.¹⁰⁸ Yet the distance between the nine named sites is significant. Given the extent of the frontier with the Slavs and the Avars, this listing of nine places cannot be seriously understood to encompass all of it, all of the time.¹⁰⁹ Even if these were central locations¹¹⁰ from which control was meant to fan out, the size of the territory in question would have made it impossible that six people could have kept perfect watch over all of it, even when we remember that they would have depended on subordinate agents as well. And, indeed, the Franks never succeeded in fully enforcing this chapter, evident, for instance, in weapons that were transferred across the frontiers despite the prohibitions against this.¹¹¹ The capitulary is best understood as marking out a region in which force

suggests that this is misleading, as the problem was selling arms that would be taken beyond the empire, not buying arms in the named locations within the empire. The additional phrase was then omitted from the subsequent versions, and later legislation that repeated this passage clarified the point. See Glatthaar, "Drei Fassungen," 452. As Hardt notes, this does not mean merchants themselves cannot proceed further, simply that they should go through those places. See Hardt, "Bardowick und Erfurt," 71–72n4, also Hardt, "Erfurt im Frühmittelalter," 20n46. However, Timme's suggestion that only those carrying weapons are meant seems to me too narrow; the passage does try to talk about trade more broadly, albeit in the dynamic mode I propose here. Compare Timme, "Scheeßel," 129–30.

107 On the logic of the places chosen, and the difficulties, see Hübener, "Orte des Diedenhofener." For their place in Carolingian administrative geography, see Smith, "*Fines Imperii*," 179.

108 Pre-existing features of these places may also have led to their selection in the first place: Brachmann, "Markt als Keimform," 117–18.

109 On the distances involved, see McCormick, *European Economy*, 378.

110 Which is also not to say that all the places were similar in layout and function; emphasizing difference, see Schmauder, "Überlegungen," 65–69, especially 68. For more attention to similarity, see Brachmann, "Markt als Keimform," 119–20, 127. Both are aware, however, that the locations may not have been in continuous use. Schneeweiß, "Neue Überlegungen," also emphasizes the provisional character of some of these places. Hardt, "Erfurt im Frühmittelalter," 21, puts more stress on previous development. The works cited in note 101 above offer a range of opinions on the nature of the named places.

111 McCormick, *European Economy*, 732–33. We cannot discount that some of the finds of Frankish weapons, in particular swords, outside the frontier are a result of gifts, but the number and the location of finds indicate trade is also a factor. Compare Schmauder, "Überlegungen," 82, who

could be exerted at particular points, without us imagining a complete walling off of the frontier.¹¹²

The flexible definition of a trade zone with key nodes is also reflected in the personnel arrangements mandated by the capitulary. Merchants were directed to nine different locations, which were supervised by six different *missi*.¹¹³ Areas assigned to *missi*¹¹⁴ were not yet strictly defined, so new *missi* arriving in a region would not necessarily have the same geographical areas of influence,¹¹⁵ not to mention the fact that they did not yet have set terms of office.¹¹⁶ Moreover, supervising trade and merchants was only one task assigned to *missi*, who had many other responsibilities and were in any case major aristocrats with concerns of their own that had nothing to do with what the court wanted of them.¹¹⁷ *Missi* also were not inevitably present in their regions, as it was counts who were the primary local authorities.¹¹⁸ In addition, the process of defining the scope of action of *missi* was still ongoing. These early years of the ninth century were a period in which *missi* could potentially do many things, but what any individual *missus* did was largely shaped by his own initiative in taking up whatever

emphasizes instead the limited number of finds; similarly, Pöppelmann, “Waffen und Brünnen.” Brather, “Fremdgut,” stresses gift exchange of weapons, while also noting the range of possible contexts for exchange. There are some useful photographs of swords found in the period of the Saxon conquest in Stiegemann and Wemhoff, *Kunst und Kultur*, catalogue vol. I, 286–92, 307–11.

112 For the emphasis on function over location, see Johaneck, “Fränkische Handel,” 17–18, and focus on people over place, see Rörig, “Magdeburgs Entstehung,” 606; with comment in Schmauder, “Überlegungen,” 81. On emphasis on control points not boundaries, see also Stieldorf, *Marken und Markgrafen*, 105.

113 It is possible that Madelgaud, who is given control over three places, is two separate people. Most manuscripts make clear that the Madelgaud who oversees Erfurt and Hallstadt is the same person, but if this is the same Madelgaud who was assigned to *Schezla* is less certain, although I think it likely and count it as such here. See Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen,” 466–47. On this person, see further note 120 below.

114 Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen,” 460, assumes the *missi* are special *missi*, as opposed to ordinary *missi* (as did Dopsch, *Wirtschaftsentwicklung*, vol. 2, 197). As I do not find this distinction particularly helpful for the reign of Charlemagne (see Davis, “Inventing the *Missi*,” 29–30), I will not employ it here. Older efforts to distinguish the types of agents involved depend on outmoded understandings of how Carolingian official service worked (such as Klebel, “Ostgrenze,” 8–9; Timme, “Scheeßel,” 126–28). Similarly, Timme’s arguments that the places listed were determined by office-holders is not sustainable given the lack of such clearly defined offices in particular locations; compare Timme, “Scheeßel,” 131–32.

115 See also Hübener, “Orte des Diedenhofener,” 252.

116 Davis, “Inventing the *Missi*,” 29.

117 The now classic study of the *missi* is Werner, “*Missus*.” Also essential is Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions*, 23–26.

118 Although *missi* did typically serve in locations where they already had power; see Eckhardt, “*Capitularia missorum*,” 509–16. Some *missi* also were counts.

tasks interested him, in dialogue with, but not fully controlled by, the royal court.¹¹⁹ Thus, a first impression of precision in the arrangements made to supervise trade near the frontier needs to be qualified. The *missi* doing the regulation were only occasionally present, were responsible for a large territory, were engaged in multiple activities beyond overseeing trade and merchants, and were able to shape their own work as *missi* to a significant extent. What this passage envisions, then, is a zone of trade contact, with attention focused on particular nodes in the network, but also with dependence on particular individuals, who would inevitably carry out their commissions in somewhat different ways.

The people meant to oversee trade were not a random subsection of the aristocracy, but particular individuals chosen for the job.¹²⁰ As Jinty Nelson has written: “Who was in control, then? ... Charlemagne wished to be; but the fact was that he could only work through those ‘in charge’ at the frontier posts.”¹²¹ Nelson establishes that those people were carefully selected, but this does not negate the irregularity of the arrangements.¹²² Over time, the people “in charge” would have changed.¹²³ Such a system would not have been without holes, and depended on the honesty and efficiency of office-holders. One response to these inevitable flaws was to find ways to encourage both merchants and *missi* to do their parts. Presumably, as suggested above, merchants would have been willing to come to such places because of the amenities, such as markets or protection, they could provide, and McCormick has noted coinage evidence that suggests the named sites did attract trade.¹²⁴ Similarly, the *missi* charged with overseeing trade at the named locations were given encouragement to fulfill this task. The capitulary offers *missi* a significant incentive for vigilance when it rules that those who have sold arms beyond the frontier lose their property, which is to be split between the responsible *missi* (and those

119 Davis, “Inventing the *Missi*.”

120 Michael Glatthaar argues that Charles the Younger, Charlemagne’s son, who was fighting in the region in the period around the composition of the capitulary, and who was assigned that area in the king’s plan for his succession adopted in 806 CE (*Capit*, 1, no. 45, chap. 3, 127), played a role in shaping its arrangements. See Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen,” 474–77, who also seeks to ascribe a role to Charlemagne’s son Pippin of Italy. As for who these men were, some questions remain. Three are relatively easily identified: Warner and Audulf, both active in Bavaria, present few problems. If the Madelgaud mentioned in this text is one person or two, and if either are the same as the Madelgaud active as a *missus* around Rouen in 802, is less clear. For discussion and further references, see Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen,” 466–67, 474; Nelson, “Paradoxes of Power,” 35–36. Older discussion in Klebel, “Ostgrenze,” 8–9; Timme, “Scheeßel,” 125n18.

121 Nelson, “Paradoxes of Power,” 35.

122 Nelson, “Paradoxes of Power,” 35–36.

123 When the chapter was included in Ansegisus’s capitulary collection in 827 CE, the names of the responsible *missi* were omitted: Ansegisus, *Collectio capitularium*, bk. 3, chap. 6, 572–73. See further note 130 below.

124 McCormick, *European Economy*, 378.

who discovered the fault) and the court.¹²⁵ This is particularly the case because such fines were often one-third of the amount taken, not one-half.¹²⁶

Yet how exactly the *missi* were meant to go about their tasks of overseeing merchants and making sure arms were not sold beyond the frontier is nowhere fully specified. The capitulary neither lays out a full list of duties associated with overseeing merchants, nor does it articulate what particular procedures should be used in such efforts. Some of what the *missi* would have done is clear from other evidence. For instance, one major job associated with trading sites is the levying of tolls,¹²⁷ often taken at both markets and communication points.¹²⁸ Trying to direct trade to these

125 Admittedly, the *missi* split this with those who found the fault (see also Nelson, “Paradoxes of Power,” 35–36), but it seems likely such a division would not have been even and thus that the *missi* were given a significant financial incentive to crack down on illicit trade. Hardt, “Bardowick und Erfurt,” 71, assumes an even division between *missi* and discoverers, but this seems less plausible to me. Glatthaar has noticed an important variation in the manuscripts in this passage. The “Sens” version he identifies as the earliest specified that the half of the goods not sent to the palace were to be divided between counts, *missi*, and those who discovered the crime. This type of confiscation was still an inducement for vigilance, but it does raise questions about who the counts were. Clearly, the named figures were *missi*: all versions except for one of the sub-classes of the three main versions refer to aforementioned *missi*, and the one that does not makes no mention of counts, so the named figures could only have been *missi*. This means that even if those named individuals were also counts, the reference at the end to counts would seemingly be other counts in addition to the *missi*. The participation of counts envisioned in the Sens version thus creates some problems, particularly as counts often had oversight over basic financial matters. As Glatthaar notes, *missi* do have a supervisory authority (and thus he suggests were ultimately in control regardless of if they were counts), but it would still be interesting to explore further why the first version might have mentioned counts as playing a role in these arrangements, in addition to the *missi* indicated in all three versions. Glatthaar argues omitting counts in the subsequent versions is largely a matter of clarity, which is certainly possible, but it would also be useful to consider more broadly the question of how economic oversight was imagined to be shared by different kinds of agents. For Glatthaar’s discussion, see Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen,” 452–53. It is also true that Carolingian sources from the early ninth century, including beyond the reign of Charlemagne, used a range of terminology to refer to agents in charge; see Schmauder, “Überlegungen,” 69 on this issue in relationship to our capitulary. See also note 114 above on older views of office-holding in relationship to this passage and note 151 below on counts, *missi*, and economic management.

126 Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions*, 41–44.

127 On royal control of tolls, see Adam, *Zollwesen*, 213–17; on toll legislation: Siems, *Handel und Wucher*, 449–52; Johaneck, “Fränkische Handel,” 21–26; on toll stations: McCormick, *European Economy*, 640–47; on the geography of toll exemptions: Stoclet, *Immunes*, 189–98. Baur and Kirchberger’s effort to define the places in the capitulary as toll stations, but not marketplaces, does not correspond to my reading of the evidence: Baur and Kirchberger, “Diedenhofener Kapitular,” 95, 106.

128 For instance, from the Capitulary of Thionville itself: *Capit.* 1, no. 44, 13, 124–25: “De teloneis placet nobis, ut antiqua et iusta telonea a negotiatoribus exigantur, tam de pontibus quam et de navigiis seu mercatis; nova vero seu iniusta, ubi vel funes tenduntur, vel cum navibus sub pontibus transitur seu et his similia, in quibus nullum adiutorium iterantibus praestatur, ut non exigantur; similiter etiam nec de his qui sine negotiandi causa substantium suam de una domo sua ad aliam

particular places even if those places were not unchangingly the favoured locations for trade allowed the court to encourage and profit from exchange,¹²⁹ without necessitating a fully developed, permanent trading infrastructure. The combination of an extensive territory, powerful and independent *missi*, incentives to regulate trade, the impossibility of fully completing the task, and the lack of detailed direction resulted in a flexible zone of regulation. What the capitulary chapter did was set up, at one moment in time (and indeed this chapter was not always copied),¹³⁰ a zone for economic interaction,¹³¹ defined by both useful locations and important people, in which trade was encouraged. It created a dynamic, targeted network for extraction of resources but one that depended deeply on how particular agents, who were not permanently in place, chose to enforce it.

ducunt aut ad palatium aut in exercitum. Si quid vero fuerit unde dubitetur, ad proximum placitum nostrum quod cum ipsis missis habituri sumus interrogetur.”

129 See also Johaneck, “Fränkische Handel,” 17–18.

130 The chapter is occasionally omitted, as in the following ninth-century manuscripts: Nürnberg, Stadtbibliothek, Cent. V, App. 96 (second third of the ninth century, Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, part 2, 327; Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium*, 403); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 4628 (third quarter of the ninth century, Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, part 3, 99; Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium*, 486) and 10753 (mid-ninth-century, Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, part 3, 167; Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium*, 584), and Sankt Paul im Lavanttal, Archiv des Benediktinerstiftes, 4/1 (early ninth century; Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium*, 689–90), as well as the later Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 4626 (Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium*, 479) and Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chigi F. IV. 75 (Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium*, 760, 765–66). I leave aside here codices with only a single chapter. There are connections to be made between some of these manuscripts. My point here is simply that the chapter was not inevitably copied. Anseghisus’s version omits both the problematic *Schezla* and, as noted above, the names of the *missi*: Anseghisus, *Collectio capitularium*, bk. 3, chap. 6, 572–73, and Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen,” 466n76. On some other variations in manuscripts that do include the chapter, and potential reasons for some of these, see Glatthaar, “Drei Fassungen,” 466–67. The inclusion of some of the language about selling arms in Charles the Bald’s Edict of Pitres in 864 CE (*Capit.* 2, no. 273, chap. 25, 321, via Anseghisus) has more to do with the particular circumstances of that capitulary than with any possible continuities; compare Schmauder, “Überlegungen,” 81. Lack of continuity in terms of place is also noted by Johaneck, “Fränkische Handel,” 18, although he means long-term in the ninth century, as opposed to my suggestion here of a dynamic system during the reign of Charlemagne. Dopsch too comments on the temporary nature of the arrangements envisioned in the capitulary, but he interprets this as a consequence of the special circumstances necessitated by conflict with Bohemians and Saxons in this period, not as a more general approach to administration. Dopsch, *Wirtschaftsentwicklung*, vol. 2, 197–98. Similarly, Hardt argues for a new frontier concept linked to the imperial coronation, and the challenges faced by this conception, leading to changes in frontier structure: Hardt, “Diedenhofener Kapitular,” 42. He does elsewhere emphasize the economic concerns of the chapter, while still noting change over time on the frontier: Hardt, “Erfurt im Frühmittelalter,” 26–28; Hardt, “Magdeburg und die Ostgrenze,” 175.

131 For “funneling” of trade to particular spots, see McCormick, *European Economy*, 579–80.

“Those New Denarii Advance and They Are to Be Accepted by Everyone”¹³²

Such a dynamic model might seem unlikely to be effective. And, indeed, as was noted above, the Carolingians did not fully succeed in enforcing this capitulary chapter, demonstrated most obviously by the weapons finds beyond the frontier. Yet, at least some of the time, this kind of dynamic, targeted regulation worked. We can see this most clearly by considering control over coinage. Looking at the history of coinage under Charlemagne seems to take us far from this model of targeted, occasional extraction, because control over the coinage was so successful.¹³³ Nonetheless, a brief analysis of Charlemagne’s control of the coinage helps us see how economic interventions, when essential, could be effectively undertaken and thus adds another key factor to our story. Carolingian economic interventions were not chaotic; they were targeted—and, when necessary, as in the case of coinage, quite carefully managed, without that management needing to be entirely comprehensive.

Charlemagne introduced a significant reform of the Frankish coinage in 793 CE,¹³⁴ resulting in the coinage type known as the monogram coinage: a largely standardized, well-regulated, royally controlled, high-volume coinage.¹³⁵ Coinage is both a political tool as well as an economic one.¹³⁶ However, the fact that almost 90 percent of the single finds of Charlemagne’s monogram coinage are found more than 100 kilometres from their place of minting indicates for us that coinage was indeed being employed for trade.¹³⁷ According to Charlemagne and his men, the coinage used for such trade had to be Frankish.¹³⁸ Carolingian legislation regularly announces that valid Carolingian coinage must be accepted, and that *only* Carolingian coinage is valid within the empire.¹³⁹

132 See note 138 for this passage.

133 Evident, for instance, in the lack of coin forgeries; on this, see Coupland, “Good and Bad Coin.”

134 For arguments about the date, see Garipzanov, “Regensburg.”

135 The best current overview is Coupland, “Charlemagne and His Coinage.” Key earlier studies include: Grierson, “Money and Coinage”; Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, 205–10; Coupland, “Charlemagne’s Coinage.”

136 The ideological aspects are particularly well discussed by Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language*, chap. 4.

137 Coupland, “Charlemagne and His Coinage,” 449.

138 As in the passage beginning this section, *Capit.* 1, no. 28, chap. 5, 74: “De denariis autem certissime sciatis nostrum edictum, quod in omni loco, in omni civitate et in omni empturio similiter vadant isti novi denarii et accipiuntur ab omnibus. Si autem nominis nostri nomisma habent et mero sunt argento, pleniter pensantes, si quis contradicit eos in ullo loco in aliquo negotio emptionis vel venditionis: si ingenuus est homo, quindecim solidos componat ad opus regis; si servilis conditionis, si suum est illud negotium proprium, perdat illud negotium aut flagelletur nudus ad palam coram populo; si autem ex iussione sui domini fecerit, tunc ille dominus solidos quindecim componat, si ei adprobatum fuerit.” See also *Capit.* 1, no. 52, chap. 7, 140: “De monetis, ut in nullo loco moneta percutiatur nisi ad curtem; et illi denarii palatini mercantur et per omnia discurrant.”

139 In addition to the references given above, the Capitulary of Thionville makes this point: *Capit.* 1, no. 44, chap. 18, 125: “De falsis monetis, quia in multis locis contra iustitiam et contra edictum fiunt, volumus ut nullo alio loco moneta sit nisi in palatio nostro, nisi forte iterum a nobis aliter fuerit ordinatum; illi tamen denarii qui modo monetati sunt, si pensantes et meri fuerint, habeantur.” As

Enforcing such a claim would require that the Carolingians were able to stop foreign coinage, and melt it down, potentially to be reminted.¹⁴⁰ Remarkably enough, the evidence of coin finds suggests that this did indeed work, at least much of the time.

No border, not even a modern one, much less a medieval one, is ever impermeable. And we do have evidence of occasional non-Carolingian coins found within Carolingian territory. However, these finds are surprisingly few. New coinage finds emerge constantly, although where and how coins are found is significantly impacted by differences in modern laws about reporting and metal detection. Nonetheless, the known finds to date, both single finds and hoards, have revealed very few “foreign” coins among the thousands and thousands of Carolingian coins.¹⁴¹ What has been found, however, reveals important patterns. First of all, the finds do imply that much of the coinage that did get past Carolingian controls was tied to trade.¹⁴² The link between foreign coinage and trade is suggested in particular by find spots along borders and transportation routes.¹⁴³ This picture is reinforced by coinage finds outside the Carolingian eastern frontier, along the Amber Trail, which, in Michael McCormick’s demonstration, allow us a glimpse into revived trade networks that are harder to see inside the empire because of these very coinage controls.¹⁴⁴ A second important pattern relates to regional variation. For example, unsurprisingly, the limited Arab coinage found in Carolingian Aquitaine and Gascony often came from Spain.¹⁴⁵ Italy, only some of which was ruled by the Carolingians, presents a different picture, most evident in the highly limited archaeological evidence

coins were not in fact only minted at the palace, what this passage (and the one above) means is debatable. See Coupland, “Formation of a European Identity,” 216; Coupland, “Charlemagne and His Coinage,” 435, for one suggestion: coinage minted at only royal sites throughout the empire, not just the palace, presumably Aachen. I would be inclined to understand it as a designation of royal authority, not a comment on the geography of minting.

140 How often foreign coinage was actually reminted is not yet entirely clear, although increased ability to evaluate and localize silver content is improving our understanding. See Sarah, “Silver Coins”; Sarah et al., “Analyses élémentaires.”

141 There is a list in Coupland, “Roermond Coins,” 41–43, noting finds of Arabic, Anglo-Saxon, and papal coinage. McCormick, *European Economy*, chap. 12 and appendix 3 catalogues finds of Byzantine and Arabic coinage in the Carolingian empire, for the period from the seventh century to ca. 900 CE. One could simply claim there was not much foreign coinage to be kept out. However, the evidence for trade connections, increased internal monetization and attention to coinage, and the presence of Carolingian coinage outside the empire does suggest that we need to explain the limited finds of foreign coins.

142 I draw here on McCormick, *European Economy*, particularly chap. 12. It is true that more Arab coins have been found from North Africa than from the caliphate, but given the small numbers it is hard to know how much weight to put on this. In addition, trade was of course not the inevitable context for loss of coin; see, for instance, on finds of Anglo-Saxon coin associated with pilgrimage, Naismith, “Peter’s Pence,” 226–27.

143 McCormick, *European Economy*, 386, addressing both Arabic and Byzantine coinage.

144 McCormick, *European Economy*, 369–79.

145 Parvérie, “La Circulation des monnaies”; Parvérie, “La Circulation des dirhams”; Parvérie, “Questions sur l’importation”; Parvérie, “Corpus des monnaies arabo-musulmanes”; Parvérie, “Une

for use of coin.¹⁴⁶ The importance of regional particularity is clear not just in finds in Italy but in finds elsewhere that reflect Italian circumstances.¹⁴⁷ For instance, the three hoards including Arab coinage that can be securely dated to the reign of Charlemagne all contained coins that likely entered through Italy, evident in both the North African origin of the Arabic coinage and two of the hoards' inclusion of coins minted in Italy.¹⁴⁸ On the whole, however, the evidence of coin finds shows a successful Carolingian effort to ensure only Frankish coins circulated in Carolingian territory.

How then did these coinage controls actually work? This extent of frontier control¹⁴⁹ is a notable achievement and one that is not especially easy to explain. While more research on the political mechanisms for control of coinage is needed, a possible answer for how the Carolingians managed to hold the coinage frontier emerges from consideration of the same capitulary chapter we just examined. On first glance, the apportioning of particular places of responsibility to different people seems a sort of scatter-shot approach to economic management, one that has little in common with control over the coinage, which is arguably the best evidence for standardization one can find in the reign of Charlemagne.¹⁵⁰ But there is good reason to think that the two fit together.

As I have suggested, the model of overseeing merchants and trade proposed by the Capitulary of Thionville is targeted: the attempt was not made to wall off the frontier, which in any case would have been impossible, but to highlight points of control in a wider area. The method of supervision was thus both geographical and personal, it almost inevitably would have been irregular due both to the lack of coverage of all

voie d'importation"; Parvérie, "Updated Corpus." The extent of economic links with Umayyad Spain are worthy of more attention than they can be given here.

146 A good entry into the Italian situation (notably, the very limited coinage finds) can be found in the studies of Alessia Rovelli, many now collected in Rovelli, *Coinage and Coin*. McCormick also considers the Italian evidence for what he calls "virtual coins," that is, references to Arabic coinage in documents, to be distinctive. See McCormick, *European Economy*, chap. 11.

147 Particularly due to the coexistence of multiple monetary systems in Italy, a full analysis would need to attend to regional difference within Italy. See, for example, McCormick, *European Economy*, 361–69 on the specific situation of Venice and the Adriatic coast.

148 These are the Biebrich, Steckborn, and Ilanz hoards. For comment see Coupland, "Charlemagne and His Coinage," 449–50; McCormick, *European Economy*, 360–61 and most fully Ilich, "Steckborner Schatzfund." The dating of coin finds poses problems. While coins themselves are often datable, the date of minting is simply a date *post quem* for the deposition of the coin not the actual date of deposition. Hoards that contain many coins offer more secure grounds for dating of deposition by considering the minting dates of all the coins in combination, as well as attention to such features as time of circulation, to the extent we can judge this.

149 Using the concept of a frontier for medieval realities is not without its problems and can only be done with the recognition that we are taking about zones of contact, not strict boundary lines. There is now a very extensive literature on the issue. To give just a few examples out of many, see Pohl et al., *Transformation of Frontiers*; Smith, "*Fines Imperii*"; and Abulafia and Berend, *Medieval Frontiers*, especially the article by Ellenblum.

150 An observation that I owe to Simon Coupland.

areas and to this dependence on personal enforcement, and it was dynamic, in its toggling between place and person. Yet it is also a way of focusing resources where it counted. This works too for coinage. Agents¹⁵¹ who participated in the process presumably benefited from extracting a fee for overseeing the melting down, and those who did not were liable to punishment for not enforcing control over coinage.¹⁵² The combined carrot and stick approach seems to have offered sufficient inducement that the coin finds we have (making due allowance for the irregularity of finds and reporting requirements) respected a monetary frontier. In addition, creating economic “hot spots” where it was to the advantage of both merchants and royal agents to come together created a dynamic space conducive to control over resources, including coinage. The kinds of people attracted to the Thionville network (and others like it) were often the ones who had the foreign coins. Some coins no doubt were missed by this type of dragnet. But the dynamic trading framework created, for the most part, had a strong enough centre of gravity to pull the coins to their nodes. While we cannot prove definitively that coin was melted down and possibly reminted at such trading spots, nor that the same methods of control were used everywhere in the empire,¹⁵³ the existence of a clear monetary frontier (including in the region addressed by the Capitulary of Thionville)¹⁵⁴ does suggest

151 Supervision of the coinage would often have been done by the local count, as is suggested by legislation from the reign of Charlemagne’s son, Louis the Pious: *Capit.* 1, no. 147, chap. 1, 299: “*Ut civitatis illius moneta publice sub custodia comitis fiat.*” The letters in italics are the editor’s interventions. Unfortunately, the only surviving copy of this capitulary is significantly damaged. Nonetheless, the text makes frequent references to the role of counts in overseeing coinage. It is interesting then that the Capitulary of Thionville ascribes this authority to *missi* (if I am correct that supervising coinage is one thing the agents at the named sites were doing, a claim further supported by chap. 18 of this capitulary, cited in note 139 above, that seemingly applied to *missi*, among others). While many aspects of political practice shifted from Charlemagne to his son, other evidence from the reign of Charlemagne (such as that cited in the next note) similarly ascribes power over coinage to counts. Some legislation does give *missi* economic roles, as in enforcing fines for unjust levying of tolls (presumably by the counts, and thus requiring enforcement by the *missi*); for instance: *Capit.* 1, no. 90, chap. 8, 190–91: “*De theloneis, ut nullus aliter teloneum presumat tollere nisi secundum antiquam consuetudinem, et aliubi non tollatur nisi ad locis antiquis legitimis; et cui iniuste tollitur, secundum legem componat et insuper bannum nostrum ad missi nostri componat.*” It would be interesting to consider how much Thionville’s focus on the *missi* as a power of first resort is unusual because of its interest in the frontiers, or how much the varying roles given to counts and *missi* might relate to the dynamic nature of economic management discussed here.

152 For instance, *Capit.* 1, no. 63, chap. 7, 152: “*De monetis statutum est ut nullus audeat denarium merum et bene pensantem reiectare; et qui hoc facere presumpserit, si liber fuerit, bannum componat, si servus, corporali disciplina subiaceat. Et in cuiuscumque comitatum et potestate inventum fuerit et denarius ex dominica moneta bene merus et pensantes reiectaverit, episcopus, abba aut comes, in cuiuslibet potestate ut diximus inventi fuerit et hoc emendare distullerint, honore priventur.*” See also Siems, *Handel und Wucher*, 477–81, especially 478.

153 Case studies such as this one could be usefully done for other regions of the empire. The southern reaches of Carolingian power in Aquitaine, Gascony, and Catalonia would be interesting to investigate in this regard, given their proximity to Umayyad Spain.

154 While the Slavic and Avar societies beyond the Thionville frontier were not monetized, they still collected coins, and merchants trading with them would have used coin.

that the dynamic network of trading sites, defined by both people and places, envisioned in the Capitulary of Thionville, may well have succeeded in providing an effective context for control over coinage.

Windows to a Wider World

Coinage is frequently evoked by scholars examining Carolingian ties to a wider world, particularly because of earlier theories that one can best explain the increase in the volume of coinage under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious via the melting down and reuse of Islamic silver, found in bulk in Scandinavia.¹⁵⁵ This theory poses problems, primarily because most of these Scandinavian finds post-date the reign of Charlemagne.¹⁵⁶ The connection I would like to make between coinage and the global Early Middle Ages is a different one, however. What I propose is that the Capitulary of Thionville's vision of economic management, including (if my suggestion is accepted) control of coinage, can also help us conceptualize contact with the East. The one chapter from the Capitulary of Thionville is of course just one example. But the model it suggests of careful targeting, rather than an unchanging comprehensive network of economic management, not only fits what we know generally of Charlemagne's governance,¹⁵⁷ it also allows us to take the gaps in the evidence seriously, to not force our sources into too neat a pattern. Royal intervention in the economy often, not inevitably, took this form of targeted extraction, rather than comprehensive coverage, and moreover depended on extensive aristocratic cooperation to get anything done.¹⁵⁸ When it mattered, as in attempting to enforce control over coinage, the rewards and potential penalties were sufficient to make the system work, most of the time. While regulating trade on the eastern frontier and melting down foreign silver were only aspects of this process, I submit this way of analysing economic history can aid our efforts to understand the wider context in which Carolingian economic intersection with the 'Abbāsids, and indeed cultural exchange more broadly, took place. That is, the model of targeted attention that emerges from the Capitulary of Thionville prompts us to think about getting a lot out of a little, whether economically or in terms of broader contact with the East.

The Capitulary of Thionville helps us see that the Carolingians managed the economy, to the extent that they did so, by focusing on targeted points of intersection.¹⁵⁹ Attention was not comprehensive or consistent but rather dynamic and irregular, and also focused, enough to make it work where it counted. This way of thinking

155 Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*, especially 171–73, building on the older work of Bolin, most easily accessible in Bolin, "Ruric." A recent review makes clear the complexity of the evidence: Kilger, "Kaupang from Afar." For the Slavic side of tenth-century trade with the East, see Jankowiak, "Dirhams for Slaves."

156 For instance, Coupland, "Charlemagne and His Coinage," 450.

157 See Davis, *Practice of Empire*, particularly Part I.

158 See also Nelson, "Paradoxes of Power," 35.

159 As Paul Fouracre has noted in another context, "a little went a relatively long way." Fouracre, "Comparing the Resources," 293. For a similar point in relationship to coinage, see McCormick, "Charlemagne and the Mediterranean World," 210.

about economic intervention offers a useful framework for exploring intersections with the ‘Abbāsīd world more broadly, economic or not.¹⁶⁰ Interaction with the ‘Abbāsīds, and through them to a broader global community, was irregular, albeit not random. Yet such moments of contact could be both occasional and significant, inconsistent and yet impactful. The way in which irregular but focused attention to economic matters could have a significant impact, in the aggregate, is similar to how occasional but consequential interactions with the caliphate could have outsize effects. The infusion of economic capital the Carolingians got from the ‘Abbāsīds was by no means the sole source of economic vitality, or even the most important one, but it was *an* important one. And yet, it need not have been remarkably large in volume nor consistent to have that impact.¹⁶¹ Other kinds of contacts could work similarly. The Carolingians did not need constant and extended contact with the caliphate to absorb and react to what they experienced: an elephant as a sign of prestige, turning attention to the Holy Land, recognizing a different imperial model. The Carolingians could leverage occasional contact with the caliphate in a targeted way, so that such contact could have a significant internal impact. We need not attempt to fill in holes in the story or build more on the fragments of evidence we have than they can support. Occasional does not equal unimportant. There is no indication that the Carolingians were anything other than a peripheral interest for the ‘Abbāsīds. But the Carolingians were able to build on that occasional attention as part of the process of expansion that remade Europe, and eventually impacted the rest of the globe.¹⁶²

Acknowledgements

Portions of the material in this article were presented at the original conference organized by Erik Hermans, at the Dumbarton Oaks symposium on Rethinking Empire (with my thanks to Dimiter Angelov and Paul Magdalino for the invitation), and at the University of Hamburg (with thanks to Philippe Depreux for the invitation). I am grateful to the audiences at all those events for discussion and suggestions. Drafts of this article or those talks have been read by Peggy Brown, Simon Coupland, Caroline Goodson, Richard Hodges, Jinty Nelson, and Chris Wickham, all of whom offered useful corrections and suggestions. The final research to complete this chapter was undertaken at the Monumenta Germaniae Historica in Munich. I am very grateful to Martina Hartmann for facilitating my work there. I also owe thanks to Sam Collins for help tracking down some articles. My colleague L. R. Poos has my sincere thanks for designing the map included in this chapter. Finally, I would like to thank Erik Hermans for his patience during the long gestation of this chapter.

160 For the broader impact of small-scale connections from a different angle, see Wickham, “Mediterranean around 800,” 161.

161 On the limits of these economic links, established via archaeological evidence, see also Wickham, “Islamic, Byzantine and Latin.”

162 See also Hodges, “Charlemagne’s Elephant,” 79.

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Chapter 15

MESOAMERICA

Heather McKillop

THE HEIGHT OF the Classic Maya civilization and its demise in the tropical landscape of Central America occurred during the Early Middle Ages.¹ The Classic period is defined as the time when the Maya erected carved monuments in the centre of cities with dates in the Maya long count between about 300 and 900 CE.² The dates recorded the dynastic histories of kings and queens of city-states. Accompanying hieroglyphs on stone monuments describe events in the lives of the dynastic leaders about marriage and other alliances, warfare with other polities, and battles won.³ The hieroglyphic record is limited by its focus on major historical events of dynastic leaders while providing virtually no information on the lives of the bulk of the Maya population, which consisted of farmers, artisans, and other non-elites. Commercial transactions, so well documented among, for instance, ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, are not found in the Maya glyphs, although pictorial depictions on painted pottery vessels include scenes featuring dynastic leaders and visitors, including feasting events and offerings or tribute payment.⁴ Most information about the ancient Maya derives from survey and excavation of sites that lack written records. This evaluation of the Early Middle Ages in the Maya area focuses on the Late Classic period (600–800 CE), the slow collapse of the southern lowland civilization that began about 750 and continued through the Terminal Classic period (800–900 CE), and the role of trade, migration, warfare, climate change, population increase, and ecological balance in the rise and fall of the Maya civilization.

With the fall of Teotihuacan by 600, the Late Classic Maya flourished, with a focus on trade within the Maya area. This included long-distance trade from the highlands to the lowlands in obsidian, jadeite, pottery, and various perishable goods that have not preserved. The collapse of the lowland city-states between 750 and 900 and the movement of people to the coast and the northern Maya lowlands, occurred during the time of ascendancy of Chichen Itza in the northern lowlands and the Toltec state north of Mexico City with its capital at Tula. The Maya in the Early Middle Ages were more

1 The term “Mesoamerica” refers to those areas in Mexico and Central America where ancient civilizations, including the Maya, developed.

2 The Maya long count records time passed since the beginning of the Maya calendar, corresponding to 3113 BCE in the Gregorian (Western) calendar. Use of the long count dates on monuments allows events to be ordered in historical time. The earliest known dated monument in the long count is 292 CE at Tikal, Guatemala. The last dated monument is 909 CE from Tonina, near Palenque, Mexico. See McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 90–96.

3 Martin and Grube, *Chronicle*.

4 Reents-Budet, *Painting*.

insular than before or after that time, but there was still much interregional trade, communication, and warfare. For example, green obsidian from the Pachuca source north of Mexico City is in the Classic period associated with trade with Teotihuacan, and then in the Post-Classic (after 900 CE) with the rise of Chichen Itza and Tula. During the Classic period, obsidian from sources in the southern Maya highlands in Guatemala was traded extensively to the Maya lowlands. However, before focusing on the ancient Maya during the Early Middle Ages and their place in the wider world, a brief overview of ancient cultural history in the Americas is provided, along with discussion of the rise of the Maya and Teotihuacan civilizations prior to the Early Middle Ages.

The Americas: An Overview

Hunting and gathering people followed mammoth, mastodon, and other Pleistocene fauna across the Bering Strait land bridge from Siberia to Alaska when the last Ice Age froze water and lowered sea levels. The Americas were populated within 1,000 years, by 12,500 BCE. Agriculture developed independently in Mesoamerica and in the Andean region of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia of South America, laying the foundation for large populations and the independent rise of early civilizations in both areas in the first millennium BCE. In North America, large chiefdoms developed at the end of the Early Middle Ages, about 800 CE, with the Hohokam in Arizona and in the southeast with the Mississippian chiefdoms, including Cahokia in Missouri and Moundville in Alabama. Long-distance trade was typical of Mississippian and earlier hunting and gathering people, such as Hopewell (200–500 CE) centred in Ohio and Poverty Point (600–700) in Louisiana. Both Hopewell and Poverty Point had trading spheres from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, with down-the-line trade likely between relatives in adjacent communities over great distances.

The Olmec on the Gulf Coast of Mexico and Chavin in the highlands of Peru had monumental architecture, trade goods, and widespread influence by their use of powerful forest felines in their art styles, reflecting underlying shamanistic ritual beliefs of these early chiefdoms in the first millennium BCE. The Olmec imported massive quantities of serpentine, as well as jadeite and other greenstones from the Motagua river basin of Guatemala. They quarried basalt from the Tuxtla mountains to the north and made large stone heads of rulers that weighed over a ton each. Both the Olmec and Chavin had widespread geographic influence through trade and emulation by other cultures of their art styles.

Andean cultures of the Early Middle Ages include the Moche, Nazca, Tiwanaku, and Huari. This was a time of regionalism, although the different cultures shared an underlying use of feline imagery in art and architecture, and each traded between the highlands and lowlands and along the desert coast. From their capital in the Moche river valley on the north coast of Peru, the Moche expanded their empire into neighbouring river valleys, using irrigation agriculture to support urban centres. Moche pottery has painted decorations of everyday life, battle scenes, and ritual, also depicted on building façades. The Moche excelled at gold working, with highly crafted gold artefacts in high-status burials, such as at Sipan, north of the Moche river. The Moche traded for seashells from

Ecuador and lapis lazuli from Chile. Drought and flooding from El Niño events caused the abandonment of the Moche capital and ultimately the demise of the civilization.

The Nazca lines on the desert coast of southern Peru were built by people who lived in the foothills of the Andes mountains overlooking the coast. Formed by stones, both animal designs and long lines in the desert sand remain enigmatic. The Tiwanaku state developed on an arid highland plateau on the shores of Lake Titicaca, in Bolivia, by modifying the land into drained fields for agriculture. Monumental architecture of Tiwanaku includes large stones and feline representations. Ultimately, drought was a factor in the abandonment of the city and end of the state. Farther north in the Andes, the Huari state developed based on rainfall agriculture and taking advantage of a strategic position for trade between the coast and highlands. The subsequent Chimú state based on the north coast of Peru was conquered by the Inca state based in the southern highlands, who were conquered by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century.

The Maya before the Early Middle Ages

The origins of the Maya civilization can be traced to diplomacy and commerce in the Late Pre-classic (300 BCE–300 CE) with charismatic leaders at regional centres, such as Cerros, Tikal, Uaxactun, and Dzibilchaltun, engaged in trade in imported jadeite from Guatemala and other luxury items, and control of labour to erect temples with elaborate masks of deities.⁵ Painted murals discovered at San Bartolo in Guatemala depict images of the Maya origin myth,⁶ known as the Popol Vuh, which was written by the Quiché Maya in the Guatemalan highlands in the sixteenth century.⁷ Discovery of images from the Popol Vuh on the murals, and in text and images on Classic Maya pottery and stone monuments indicated the story of the Popol Vuh had great antiquity. The San Bartolo murals also include a scene showing accession to a throne. This scene marks the change to rule by divine right characteristic of the Classic period dynastic Maya kings and queens. Diplomacy and warfare characterized the Classic Maya civilization of the southern Maya lowlands. The dynastic leaders used highly crafted luxury items, including commodities made from imported materials to create, display, and reinforce their status. These goods were obtained by exchange among dynastic leaders during state visits, used in feasting and other activities marking military and marriage alliances between city-states, and interred with deceased leaders who were buried with ostentatious displays of wealth in temples. Warfare with other polities, and capture of kings and other nobility, contributed to tribute payments of chocolate, cotton cloth, and other commodities. Bulk trade of corn and other basic food items, as well as obsidian, painted pots, and other commodities from various distances were available at regular marketplaces.⁸

5 Freidel, "Culture Areas."

6 Saturno, "High-Resolution Documentation."

7 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 204–13.

8 Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing"; King, *Ancient Maya Marketplace*.

In the first millennium CE, Teotihuacan and the Maya were major civilizations in the arid highlands of central Mexico and the tropical rainforest of Central America respectively. Teotihuacan collapsed before the Early Middle Ages, which was the time of major flourishing for the Maya civilization. The city of Teotihuacan, north of Mexico City, became the capital of a major empire of the same name between 0 and 600 CE. Based on irrigation agriculture, the city had monumental temples, apartment buildings for craft workers, and streets organized on a grid. Teotihuacan influence was widespread in Mesoamerica, either by trade or emulation, in the form of art styles and architecture. Teotihuacan controlled the extraction of high-quality green obsidian from the Pachuca source, with workshops in the city for production of artefacts. Regional distribution was by itinerant traders who made blades from cores on demand. Limited quantities of green obsidian blades and other tools were traded farther by long-distance traders, throughout Mesoamerica. Teotihuacan had tremendous impact on the early development of the Maya civilization.

The relationship between the Classic Maya and the central Mexican state of Teotihuacan included long-distance trade of luxury items as well as some kind of military intervention. Distinctive green obsidian from the Pachuca source was manufactured into prismatic blades and bifacial points at Teotihuacan and traded, albeit in small quantities compared to grey obsidian from the Guatemalan highlands, to the Maya lowlands. Teotihuacan-style, cylindrical pottery vessels with slab feet occur throughout the Maya area, both as trade vessels and local copies. Teotihuacan-style architecture is copied at two major cities, including Kaminaljuyu in the Maya highlands in the outskirts of Guatemala City, and at the lowland capital of Tikal. One explanation is military takeover by Teotihuacan of Kaminaljuyu to control the nearby El Chayal obsidian source and the chocolate fields on the Pacific coast.⁹ In fact, Sanders and Price asserted that the military takeover by Teotihuacan and subsequent military forays to Tikal led to a reorganization of the Maya from a chiefdom with a charismatic leader to a state level of organization with dynastic leaders whose authority was backed by military force.¹⁰

Decipherment of hieroglyphs and oxygen isotope analyses of human bone and teeth from burials at Kaminaljuyu, Tikal, Copan, and other Maya cities indicate Teotihuacan marriage or trade alliances, or perhaps military takeover. Oxygen isotope analyses of human teeth and bones indicate elite leaders buried in temples at Kaminaljuyu were born there, except one individual who spent their youth at Teotihuacan.¹¹ The arrival of a new leader at Tikal, Siyaj Can K'awil II, in 378, and his accession to the throne in 411, marks the introduction of Teotihuacan-style architecture and trade goods to the city. The Copan dynasty in Honduras was founded by Yax Kuk Mo in 426, which is recorded

⁹ Braswell, *Maya and Teotihuacan*; McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 182–86, 267; Sanders and Price, *Mesoamerica*.

¹⁰ Sanders and Price, *Mesoamerica*.

¹¹ McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 267. Oxygen isotopes are laid down in teeth and bones as a measure of the source of drinking water consumed by the individual during their life.

on Altar Q at Copan. Oxygen isotope analyses of human bone from Copan supports the hieroglyphic record that the city's founder came from the west, likely from Tikal.¹²

Instead of indicating military takeover, public architecture constructed in Teotihuacan style may be explained as emulation of a powerful state. Elaborate Teotihuacan-style pottery vessels in dynastic burials in temples may be explained as gifts from visiting leaders, a practice well documented on scenes of dynastic feasts on painted pots as well as hieroglyphs.¹³ Other items, notably green obsidian blades found at Altun Ha in northern Belize,¹⁴ fit into the interregional trade in luxury items acquired by the urban elite, such as jadeite.

The collapse of Teotihuacan by 600 left the Classic Maya as the major political and economic power in Mesoamerica. During the Late Classic period (600–800 CE), there was significant warfare within the Maya lowlands among dynastic leaders of city-states,¹⁵ with self-aggrandizement and access to food and water under conditions of rising population densities in urban areas, increases in labour and food taxation, clearing of the rainforest for agriculture, soil erosion and other denigrations to farmland, and climate change.

Late Classic Maya, 600–800 CE

By 600, there were sixty to eighty fairly independent city-states in the southern Maya lowlands of Guatemala, Belize, the Yucatan of Mexico, western Honduras, and parts of El Salvador (see [Map 14](#)).¹⁶ The city-states were loosely aligned in various confederacies through marriage and war alliances, diplomacy, and trade. The political economy was driven by dynastic kings and queens and their royal court in city centres composed of palaces, temples, marketplaces, and ball courts.¹⁷ Buildings were arranged around plazas, from the public architecture at city centres to outlying residences.¹⁸ Temples for public ceremonies and palaces used as residences and administrative uses were on raised platforms with stone or pole and thatch superstructures and they were located at city centres.¹⁹ Rooms in superstructures were long and narrow because of the corbelled-vault building technique, in which successive layers of cut stone were placed towards the opposite wall, with a capstone placed on top.²⁰ Temples were rubble-filled platforms that were faced with cut facing stone and topped with a small room for public ceremonies. They were rebuilt periodically, with interments in elaborate tombs containing

¹² Buikstra et al., "Copan Acropolis"; McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 267.

¹³ Reents-Budet, *Painting*.

¹⁴ White et al., "Teotihuacan Connection."

¹⁵ Demarest et al., "Maya Defensive Systems"; Demarest, "After the Maelstrom."

¹⁶ Martin and Grube, *Chronicle*.

¹⁷ Harrison, *Lords of Tikal*; Inomata and Houston, *Royal Courts*; McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 57.

¹⁸ McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 152.

¹⁹ Christie, *Maya Palaces*.

²⁰ McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, image on 87.



Map 14. Important Maya sites.
 © Heather McKillop and Mary Lee Eggart.

lavish, highly crafted grave goods, often made from imported materials. The royal court included elite artisans who made painted pictorial scenes of dynastic lifestyle on pottery vessels, carved jadeite and other imported materials, and wrote texts in various media, including paper books, which have decayed.²¹ What remains are historical records of dynastic leaders on carved stone monuments and building façades, as well as glyphs on pottery vessels, jadeite, and other stone artefacts, and wooden lintels such as those at Tikal's Temple 1. The monumental public architecture was built from quarried limestone (and other local rocks such as sandstone or coral), covered in lime, and painted, although the paint has rarely been preserved. Exceptions are brightly coloured scenes with people and food painted on the exterior of a building at Calakmul,²² and the interior walls of public architecture at Bonampak.²³

Stone monuments called stelae, were erected in the plazas in front of temples and palaces.²⁴ Carved with images of dynastic Maya and accompanied by hieroglyphs, the stelae were public statements about the dynastic leader's birth, marriage, and conquest of other polities. The stelae were visible to visitors to the city who arrived for the market or for religious or other public events, including a ball game. Dynastic records were carved on other stone monuments, such as Altar Q at Copan, Honduras, that records the images of dynastic leaders from a founding king.²⁵ Although the state language used in hieroglyphic writing was used throughout the Maya area (Chol Maya), indicating widespread interaction, regional differences in art styles and endemic warfare among city-states indicate people identified more with their community and city-state than with any pan-Maya identity. In fact, most people were illiterate. Use of pseudoglyphs and poorly constructed grammar on monuments and painted pictorial pottery vessels conveyed messages that were understood because of the structured placement of text and accompanying images, such as an image of a Maya king on one side of a stela, with glyphs on the other side. The small city of Nim li punit in southern Belize has thirty-one carved stone stelae, with carved depictions of dynastic leaders, but the glyphs include awkward and poor grammar.²⁶ The common use of glyph bands below the rim of vessels conveyed meaning even when they were pseudoglyphs, such as at the trading port on Moho Cay.²⁷ Regionalism in Maya art styles is evident from differences in stelae. Incised images of figures on flat surfaces at Tikal contrast to Copan's style which shows figures in the round,²⁸ and the deeply carved "cookie-cutter" style of Yaxchilan.²⁹

21 Inomata, *Royal Courts*; Reents-Budet, *Painting*; Reents-Budet, "Classic Maya Concepts."

22 Carrasco et al., "Daily Life."

23 Miller, *Maya Art*; Miller, "Life at Court."

24 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, image on 61.

25 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 185.

26 Waynerka. "Epigraphic Evidence."

27 McKillop, *Salt*, fig. 4.1.

28 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, image on 121.

29 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, image on 158.

In contrast to other ancient civilizations which had strong central governments, such as imperial China, the Aztecs, and the Incas, the Classic Maya lacked a well-developed bureaucracy, an obsession with tax records, or a strong military force. By comparison, they were less centrally organized.³⁰ Certainly warfare was common, even endemic according to some researchers, escalating during the Late Classic period.³¹ Initially, the focus among Classic Maya dynastic leaders was on self-aggrandizing, but by the Late Classic period there was an interest in control of land and labour. Classic Maya leaders conquered nearby and distant cities, placing their leaders as rulers and exacting tribute.³² Their palaces functioned as administrative offices as well as royal residences.³³ There were court scribes and a hierarchy of elites at the royal courts and in subsidiary communities within each polity, who served in administrative functions and were accountable to the dynastic leaders. Scribes were high-status individuals living in the royal court, as described for Aguateca.³⁴ The written records they have left behind on stone monuments, pottery vessels, and other objects focus on dynastic history, with little information on taxation, tribute, or other economic matters. Such economic records may have been written in paper books that did not preserve. There are only three paper books with images and text painted on bark paper and folded like an accordion, which date to the Postclassic period (900–1500). They focus on astronomical, religious, and calendrical information.³⁵ Sixteenth-century and later Spanish missionaries burned hundreds of Maya books, the 1652 horrific fire at Mani in the northern Yucatan being the most infamous.³⁶

Feasting, royal gift exchange, marriages, tribute, and trade provided important means for the ruling elite to establish, maintain, and reinforce power relationships.³⁷ At such events, held in the royal courtyard and elsewhere, Maya rulers brokered power hierarchically with dynastic leaders of other city-states, and they asserted their superior status vis-à-vis elite rulers of smaller communities within the polity and their relationships with leaders of other polities. The dynastic leaders displayed their power

30 Although some researchers argue that the Late Classic Maya were centrally organized (Chase and Chase, “Mighty Maya Nation”), others suggest that their political organization was decentralized (Demarest, “Maya State”; McKillop, *Ancient Maya*), or that it may have fluctuated over time or geographically between centralized and de-centralized modes (Marcus, “Maya Political Organization”). The Classic Maya city of Caracol reached a population size of 110,000 people in a dispersed residential landscape as a garden city that was centrally controlled by the dynastic leaders, as shown by causeways linking remote administrative nodes to the epicentre (Chase and Chase, “Ancient Maya Markets”).

31 Demarest et al., “Classic Maya Defensive”; Demarest, “After the Maelstrom.”

32 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 186–96.

33 Christie, *Maya Palaces*; Inomata and Houston, *Royal Courts*.

34 Inomata and Houston, *Royal Courts*.

35 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, 258–59.

36 Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*.

37 Chase et al., “Markets among the Ancient Maya”; Foias, “Ritual, Politics”; Masson et al., “Household Craft Production.”

through monumental architecture, stone or stucco depictions of rulers on building façades, and propaganda texts on stelae recounting, sometimes in exaggerated form, their exploits and those of their dynastic forebears. Highly crafted goods, often with value added by their non-local origin, were given as gifts. Some gifts were transported over great distances, such as the Altun Ha vase found at Copan or jadeite funeral masks on deceased royalty at Palenque. Some goods were transported on royal visits to other city-states for marriage alliances, where a royal woman from one city-state was married to a king at another city-state. Long-distance traders acting as royal emissaries or as independent traders transported exotic resources such as jadeite from sources to lowland cities, resulting in concentrations of exotics in lowland cities, regardless of distance from the source. Alternative trade patterns, such as between relatives in adjacent communities over long distances, results in a fall-off pattern with increasing distance, not characteristic of the Classic Maya.³⁸

The public architecture was built by labour tax and supported by food tax on the non-elite, mainly common Maya farmers who lived in surrounding towns and villages in the hinterlands of each city-state. The bulk of the Maya population lived in pole and thatch structures that have rarely been preserved in the tropical rainforest setting, leaving only the mounded remains with discarded domestic materials and household burials. Workshops, storage, and other buildings were also pole and thatch, similar to traditional Maya villages today. Due to preservation in mangrove peat below the sea floor, wooden buildings have been preserved at the Paynes Creek salt works, where wooden posts demarcate the rectangular building outlines.³⁹ The dynastic Maya exercised their political power not only through tribute from conquered city-states and subsidiary populations within their realm but also by maintaining marketplaces.⁴⁰ With urban populations reaching 100,000 at the capital city of Tikal,⁴¹ and perhaps 110,000 at Caracol,⁴² agricultural products and labour were in high demand for public works such as the rebuilding and renovation of stone temples, palaces, and causeways. Representations of tribute payment can be seen in painted scenes on pottery vessels and on the temple murals at Bonampak.⁴³ Xuniak women specialized in cloth production in the Terminal Classic, at a time when the nearby city of Chichen Itza reached its peak and demanded tribute.⁴⁴ Large number of artisans and others living in Classic Maya cities had to be fed. Without evidence of extensive storage facilities (in contrast to the Inca warehouses), urban marketplaces may have served as places where people acquired food as well as goods and resources from nearby and more distant places.⁴⁵ At Calakmul, a salt merchant is

38 See Renfrew, "Trade as Action," fig. 10, for different models of long-distance trade.

39 McKillop, "Finds in Belize."

40 King, *Ancient Maya Marketplace*.

41 Harrison, *Lords of Tikal*.

42 Chase and Chase, "Ancient Maya Markets."

43 Miller, "Life at Court"; Reents-Budet, *Painting*; Reents-Budet, "Classic Maya Concepts."

44 Ardren et al., "Cloth Production."

45 Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing."

depicted on the exterior of a temple, along with corn and cacao vendors.⁴⁶ The depiction of the salt person on the temple at Calakmul underscores the importance of salt to the dynastic Maya and in the Classic Maya market economy. Selling food at markets beyond a city-state's boundaries also may have been a good risk-management strategy in case of local crop shortages or surpluses.⁴⁷

Land-Based Trade

The economy of Classic Maya civilization often is discussed as having a dual structure, mirroring the noble/commoner class structure. The "political economy," by which the dynastic leaders acquired and maintained political power, included the court artisans who made highly crafted goods for royal feasts, alliances, and other affairs of state.⁴⁸ By way of contrast, the "subsistence economy" included household production of goods and resources and is not generally viewed as figuring in the geopolitical landscape of dynastic Maya power struggles.⁴⁹ However, access to exotic or well-crafted elite goods was not restricted to the nobility. Wealthy commoners acquired well-crafted goods and exotics for their own use. In addition, commoners sometimes made goods destined for the dynastic or other noble Maya.⁵⁰ Marketplaces at the end of roads that lead to downtown Caracol provided a location for goods and resources from near and far to be traded.⁵¹ Exotics such as obsidian as well as painted serving vessels were widely distributed to commoner households within the city, underscoring market distribution. The highest quality and quantity of high-crafted goods, often from exotic material, were found in dynastic and other elite contexts at Caracol, but the exotic materials were still commonly found throughout the city.

Classic Maya householders were not as self-sufficient as once thought but instead often produced surplus and participated in marketplace trade for goods and resources made by other householders within the community as well as beyond.⁵² At Ceren, householders specialized in agricultural or craft products and took them to markets outside the village where they traded for goods made by elites and specialists.⁵³ Although the elite had more valuable commodities—including the most highly crafted items—obsidian, jadeite, and other exotics as well as finely made painted pottery were available to commoners through markets.⁵⁴ That commoners had choices of markets to attend to

46 Carrasco et al., "Daily Life."

47 Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing."

48 Masson and Freidel, *Maya Political Economies*.

49 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*.

50 Rochette, "Jade in Full."

51 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya."

52 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya"; Masson et al., "Household Craft Production"; Sheets et al., "Sociopolitical Economy."

53 Sheets et al., "Sociopolitical Economy."

54 Cap, "How I Know"; Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya"; Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing"; Masson and Freidel, "An Argument"; Sheets et al., "Sociopolitical Economy."

obtain goods is also underscored by Masson and Freidel, who envisage “nested market networks,” with markets at major and secondary cities.⁵⁵ Commoners also were involved in the extraction and production of valuable materials such as jadeite,⁵⁶ traditionally thought to be an elite good. By the late Post-Classic period at Mayapan, “most surplus craft workers were affluent commoners” working in households throughout the city, in addition to elite craftspeople and artisans working under direction of elites.⁵⁷ Extensive part-time craft production by households contributed significantly to the amount of goods distributed throughout all levels of society, which also stabilized the political economy,⁵⁸ was good risk management for households, and useful for distributing food in times of local shortages or surpluses.⁵⁹

Artisans at royal Maya courts included skilled specialists in writing, painting, and carving, often using imported obsidian, jadeite, or other materials which added value as “prestige” items.⁶⁰ These goods were used predominantly for royal gifting, exchange, and display that supported, maintained, and helped create the dynastic leaders’ authority.⁶¹ Royal court artisans included highly skilled craft workers who produced painted pots, jade ornaments, painted murals, and sculpture, as well as scribes who painted hieroglyphic texts in paper books.⁶² Goods were produced for the dynastic leaders, who used them as gifts to their peers in other Maya polities and to lesser lords within their own polity, in royal feasts, and in other affairs of state. Sometimes, such objects are found in burials; their use is recorded on pictorial painted pots and carved or painted on building façades.⁶³

An impressive array of resources was obtained from distant locations, including jadeite, obsidian, basalt, mercury, marine shells, and stingray spines, among others. Long-distance trade was between the volcanic regions of Guatemala and the Maya lowlands, which had different natural resources. The volcanic highlands had obsidian, basalt, mercury, and various greenstones, including jadeite. Obsidian was transported by traders from two major locations, including El Chayal near Guatemala City and Ixtepeque to the east. Cylindrical cores were transported, with long narrow blades made at lowland markets and ports in the lowlands. Obsidian was widely traded due to the sharp edges on a freshly made blade, which were used for ritual bloodletting and other more mundane tasks. Basalt was traded to make grinding stones used for processing corn, a staple. Mercury was a rare trade good, known from offerings at Copan, Quirigua, and Lamanai, naturally occurring in Honduras.⁶⁴ Jadeite and other greenstones occur on both sides of the Motagua river, which originates near Guatemala City and enters the Caribbean in the

55 Masson and Freidel, “An Argument,” 478.

56 Rochette, “Jade in Full.”

57 Masson et al., “Household Craft Production,” 229.

58 Chase et al., “Markets among the Ancient Maya”; Masson et al., “Household Craft Production,” 230.

59 Eppich and Freidel, “Markets and Marketing.”

60 McKillop, “Classic Maya Trading,” 119–24.

61 Inomata, “Power and Ideology.”

62 Reents-Budet, *Painting*.

63 Carrasco et al., “Daily Life.”

64 Pendergast, “Ancient Maya Mercury.”

Gulf of Honduras. Jadeite was transported by traders from quarries and workshops to lowland cities for further working.

In addition, there was trade of goods and resources based on their restricted natural distributions within the Maya lowlands. Shells, seafood, and salt were traded inland from coastal areas around the Yucatan and on the south coast of Guatemala. Some coastal resources were for rituals, including stingray spines for bloodletting, large conch shells for trumpets, and shells used to make ornaments. Chert occurs naturally in the Cretaceous limestone of the lowlands but is of variable quality. High-quality chert at Colha in northern Belize was used to mass-produce stone tools which were traded regionally and farther away. In addition, pre-forms or blanks from which various tools could be made were traded. Granite from the Maya mountains in southern Belize, used for grinding stones, was traded as far as northern Belize.

Elite craft workers traded both the goods they produced for general trade and goods specifically commissioned for royalty.⁶⁵ Excavations of structures in the central portion of Aguateca indicate elite craft production on a part-time basis for luxury items including bone and shell carving and wood carving. Attached workshops of elite households at Tikal (250–850 CE) provide evidence for the production of stone, shell, and bone goods.⁶⁶ In contrast, food, materials for tools, and other subsistence goods and resources generally were obtained closer to home, although the elite evidently acquired marine and other resources from farther away, albeit in small quantities.⁶⁷ Fish must have been salted to maintain freshness for transport.

Ancient Maya workshops, including royal court and independent workshops, typically have production debris and few finished products.⁶⁸ Aoyama describes lithic debris from various stages of producing obsidian blades at Ceibal.⁶⁹ Workshops at Tikal are identified by redeposited waste, with the workshops kept clean.⁷⁰ Workshop surfaces are sometimes identified by microdebitage in floors.⁷¹ Workshops at Mayapan tended to have more standardized production intended for trade in contrast to household production for use, as well as different types of chert tools and higher densities of production debris.⁷² Workshops are often located near sources of raw material, such as chert outcrops at Colha,⁷³ Xunantunich in the upper Belize River valley,⁷⁴ and inland salt springs or the coast for salty water.⁷⁵

65 Inomata, "Power and Ideology."

66 Moholy-Nagy, "Middens, Construction Fill."

67 McKillop, "Prehistoric Exploitation."

68 Inomata, "Power and Ideology"; Jordan and Prufer, "Domestic Ceramic Production"; Masson and Freidel, "An Argument"; Moholy-Nagy, "Middens, Construction Fill."

69 Aoyama, "Ancient Maya Economy."

70 Moholy-Nagy, "Middens, Construction Fill."

71 Moholy-Nagy, "Misidentification."

72 Masson et al., "Household Craft Production."

73 Shafer and Hester, "Ancient Maya Chert."

74 Horowitz, "Uneven Lithic Landscapes."

75 McKillop, "Finds in Belize Document."

The Classic Maya participated in a market economy.⁷⁶ They had actual marketplaces where vendors and shoppers congregated periodically. The marketplace at Tikal has two lines of masonry stalls in the centre of a large plaza, as well as other stalls and related market buildings.⁷⁷ Low long mounds near city centres at other Classic Maya cities are viewed as locations of possible marketplace stalls at Maax Na and elsewhere.⁷⁸ Although there were no coins or other currency,⁷⁹ by the Late Classic period, the Maya used currency equivalencies such as cacao beans, lengths of woven cloth, copper bells, or obsidian blades.⁸⁰ The market economy was based on supply and demand that extended beyond the physical marketplaces and formed the structure of the Maya economy. The degree of dynastic control of production and distribution of goods and services varied over time and geographic space. Surplus production was integrated in the Classic Maya economy by marketplace trade, as well as by tribute. In some cases, the elite taxed vendors or otherwise administered the markets.⁸¹ Goods and resources were also exacted as tribute by rulers,⁸² taxed by rulers or their surrogates at production locales, and gifted among elites and between elites and commoners.⁸³ The widespread distribution of exotic and other non-local goods to commoners, instead of their restriction to the dynastic leaders and other elite associated with the royal compound, underscores that market forces were at play,⁸⁴ and that currency equivalencies were used during the Classic period.⁸⁵ Periodic markets regularly scheduled at different villages in the Maya highlands during historic times are a likely model for the ancient Maya.⁸⁶

The notion that Maya plazas were marketplaces has long been suggested but has gained acceptance through chemical analyses of residues in plaza markets,⁸⁷ identification of market stalls associated with plazas at Tikal,⁸⁸ Caracol,⁸⁹ among other studies,⁹⁰ including a depiction of a salt person with the glyph for salt painted on the exterior of a building at Calakmul.⁹¹ Marketplace trade took place at Caracol, a city of some 110,000 residents, where causeways connected residential areas to the city centre and

76 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya"; Masson and Freidel, "An Argument."

77 Jones, "Marketplace at Tikal."

78 King, *Ancient Maya Marketplace*.

79 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*.

80 Baron, "Ancient Monetization"; Freidel et al., "Imaging a Complex"; Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*.

81 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya"; Masson et al., "Household Craft Production," 230.

82 Masson and Freidel, *Maya Political Economies*.

83 Reents-Budet, *Painting*.

84 Masson and Freidel, "An Argument."

85 Freidel et al., "Imaging a Complex."

86 Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing."

87 Coronel et al., "Geochemical Analysis."

88 Jones, "Marketplace at Tikal."

89 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya."

90 Cap, "How I Know"; Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing"; King, *Ancient Maya Marketplace*.

91 Carrasco et al., "Daily Life."

provided pathways for traders.⁹² Marketplaces at termini causeways were places for householders to obtain goods and resources from near and far away. Exotics as well as painted and well-made pottery traded from the Belize Valley, such as Belize Red, were distributed throughout the city to commoner households through marketplace trade.⁹³ Widespread distribution of fine-ware pottery in the Late and Terminal Classic periods at El Perú-Waká indicates equal access by the Maya at this city to goods via a marketplace.⁹⁴ Eppich and Freidel suggest that food was traded at markets, with access to several markets both inside and beyond a city-state's region.⁹⁵ Marketplace trade of food was a good risk-management strategy for times of food shortage in one area and surplus in another. Ethnographic data on travel distance to markets of 18–30 kilometres would take the Maya beyond the boundaries of their city-state to markets at communities in neighbouring city-states, an idea supported by the pottery styles shared by neighbouring city-states.⁹⁶ Canoe travel would have extended that travel distance.⁹⁷

Maritime Trade

Apart from discoveries at the Paynes Creek salt works, there is no other evidence of actual ancient Maya canoes or paddles.⁹⁸ The Paynes Creek evidence of canoe travel includes the K'ak' Naab' canoe paddle, another paddle from Site 7, parts of canoe-paddle blades from the Elon Site and Site 74, and the canoe from the Eleanor Betty site.⁹⁹ The discovery of a wooden canoe paddle from the K'ak' Naab' salt works provided the first tangible evidence of ancient Maya water-borne navigation. The discovery of the Site 67 canoe is the first report of an actual Maya canoe.¹⁰⁰ The K'ak' Naab' paddle ties the production of salt to its transport in canoes. In addition to wooden posts, beams, and wedges with worked ends, wooden objects recovered from survey indicate wood working was part of the salt industry.¹⁰¹ Use-wear evidence that some of the chert tools were used in cutting and whittling wood indicates boat construction and canoe-paddle production at the Paynes Creek salt works. These discoveries underscore the importance of canoe trade and travel during the Classic period in the Maya area.¹⁰² There was canoe travel within coastal areas such as the Port Honduras and Paynes Creek salt works area, along the

92 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya."

93 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya."

94 Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing."

95 Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing."

96 Eppich and Freidel, "Markets and Marketing," fig. 5.1.

97 McKillop, "Maya Canoe Navigation"; McKillop et al., "Ancient Maya Canoe Paddle."

98 McKillop, "Finds in Belize Document"; McKillop, "Maya Canoe Navigation"; McKillop, "Early Maya Navigation."

99 McKillop, "Early Maya Navigation"; McKillop et al., "Maya Canoe Paddle."

100 McKillop et al., "Maya Canoe Paddle."

101 McKillop, *Maya Salt Works*.

102 McKillop, "Maya Canoe Navigation."

coast, and between the coast of Belize and inland Classic Maya communities. Sixteenth-century Spanish explorers to Central America disrupted ancient Maya canoe trade and travel that arguably had endured for more than a millennium. This commerce included sea trade around the Yucatan, but also shorter distance travel along inland waterways in Belize, Mexico, and Guatemala supplying the inland Maya at large urban cities with coastal resources.¹⁰³ Stingray spines for ritual bloodletting, seafood, shells for ornament and food, and quantities of salt were transported inland. The Paynes Creek Maya were engaged in production and distribution of quantities of salt on the coast of southern Belize for inland trade up nearby rivers to Late Classic inland communities in Belize.¹⁰⁴

Prior to the discovery of the K'ak'Naab' paddle, our knowledge of canoe travel was based on artistic depictions of canoes and paddles, settlement of offshore islands, and models and hypotheses about the timing and importance of ancient Maya sea trade.¹⁰⁵ Settlement of offshore islands underscores ancient Maya familiarity with boats and sea travel. Boats were necessary for transportation to island sites located off the coasts of Belize and the Yucatan including near shore islands such as Isla Cerritos, Wild Cane Cay, Moho Cay, and Frenchman's Cay,¹⁰⁶ islands located farther from the mainland such as Ambergris Caye and Cozumel,¹⁰⁷ sites over 40 kilometres offshore on the Belize barrier reef, such as Hunting Cay, and sites on atolls beyond the reef. The K'ak' Naab' paddle shows the actual size of paddles used by the Late Classic Maya: The paddle is 1.43 metres in length with a round shaft that is 5 centimetres in diameter. The grip of the K'ak' Naab' paddle is rounded and smooth, with flaking scars visible, such as could have been produced by a chert adze recovered from the site. The upper edge of the blade flares at a 90-degree angle to the shaft. The blade extends 8 centimetres from the shaft on one side, but only 2 centimetres on the other side, where it was broken in antiquity. A modern replica made of Sapodilla with both sides of the blade was used in a creek in southern Belize and found to be a good paddle from steering at the stern and basic paddling from the bow of a canoe. The paddle was carved from a species of Manilkara, probably *M. sapote* in the family Sapotaceae.¹⁰⁸ Although waterlogged, the wood is fresh in appearance, preserving the original light brown colour of the wood. Although *M. sapote* is better known for its sap, which provides chicle for chewing gum, the wood is a durable hardwood. Deciduous hardwoods do not grow in the mangrove ecosystem surrounding the lagoon, or on the adjacent pine savannah. However, they form the rainforest south of Punta Ycacos Lagoon, along the Deep River. There are artistic representations of canoes on

103 McKillop, "Maya Trading Ports"; McKillop, "Classic Maya Trading Port"; McKillop, *Search of Maya*; McKillop, "Early Maya Navigation."

104 McKillop, *Salt: White Gold*.

105 McKillop, "Finds in Belize"; McKillop, "Maya Canoe Navigation"; McKillop, "Early Maya Navigation"; Sabloff and Rathje, *Changing Pre-Columbian*.

106 McKillop, "Classic Maya Trading Port"; McKillop, *Search of Maya*; McKillop et al., "Maya Canoe Paddle."

107 Sabloff and Rathje, *Changing Pre-Columbian*.

108 McKillop, "Finds in Belize," fig. 2.

murals at the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza and elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ Miniature models of boats, similar in shape to the pictorial depictions, have been recovered from several Classic Maya sites, including canoes carved from manatee ribs from Altun Ha and Moho Cay,¹¹⁰ as well as examples in clay from Stingray Lagoon,¹¹¹ Orlando's,¹¹² and Site 74¹¹³ at the Paynes Creek salt works.

Commodities were exchanged at marketplace trade, through tribute, ritualized gifting, and feasting among dynastic leaders as depicted in scenes on painted pots, and more informal exchanges among households. Ardren et al. describe cotton cloth production on the overland route from the coast to Chichen Itza, suggesting that cotton was produced as tribute required for the Maya leadership at Chichen Itza.¹¹⁴ Another network of exchange was based on the production of other resources on the coast, such as cacao in the Port Honduras, which were transported inland and farther away along the coast.¹¹⁵ Cacao was likely added to canoes transporting salt and salted fish up rivers in southern Belize. A third network of exchange focused on extraction of marine resources which were in demand by the inland Maya for ritual and other uses such as stingray spines for bloodletting, conch shells for trumpets, shells for decoration, coral rock, pumice, and manatee bones among others.¹¹⁶ Yet another network of exchange was focused on coastal trading ports that brought commodities from farther away.¹¹⁷ In the case of the Paynes Creek salt works, commodities from more distant areas included obsidian, jadeite, and other greenstones.¹¹⁸

Trading ports along the coasts of Belize and the Yucatan of Mexico facilitated the transportation of commodities.¹¹⁹ Cacao may have been transported north along the coast to areas where cacao was in demand but not locally grown, notably the upper Belize Valley. Commodities from northern Belize include chert with tool assemblages similar to those produced at Colha, which were excavated at Wild Cane Cay,¹²⁰ the Paynes Creek salt works, and other nearby coastal communities. Belize Red pottery made in the upper Belize Valley was found at the Paynes Creek salt works. The Altun Ha pottery vase from Copan may have been transported along the coast. Mercury from Honduras, which

109 McKillop, "Finds in Belize"; McKillop, "Early Maya Navigation"; McKillop, *Maya Salt Works*.

110 McKillop, "Maya Canoe Navigation."

111 McKillop, *Salt: White Gold*, fig. 3.38b.

112 McKillop, *Salt: White Gold*, fig. 3.38c.

113 McKillop and Sills, "Spatial Patterning."

114 Ardren et al., "Cloth Production."

115 McKillop, *Maya Salt Works*.

116 McKillop, *Search of Maya*.

117 McKillop, *Search of Maya*.

118 McKillop, *Maya Salt Works*.

119 McKillop, "Classic Maya Trading Port"; McKillop, *Search of Maya*; McKillop, "Maya Canoe Navigation"; McKillop, "Early Maya Navigation."

120 McKillop, *Search of Maya*; McKillop, *Maya Salt Works*.

was found under the central ball-court marker at Lamanai,¹²¹ was likely transported along the coast and up the New River. The pattern of obsidian source use at the Paynes Creek salt works matches the obsidian source use at Wild Cane Cay and contrasts to the pattern at inland communities, indicating there were different exchange networks along the coast and inland. Ixtepeque source obsidian was more common than El Chayal at the salt works and at Wild Cane Cay, whereas inland communities of Lubaantun, Uxbenka, and Pusilha had overwhelming abundance of El Chayal obsidian.¹²² On the coast, obsidian was traded to Wild Cane Cay where prismatic blades were struck for distribution to the salt works and other sites in the Port Honduras that lack cores.¹²³ Jadeite and other greenstone objects were traded from the Motagua river outcrops, either on the north or south shores.¹²⁴ The Motagua river is a short canoe paddle from the Port Honduras area, a voyage that may have been accomplished by Maya from Wild Cane Cay or from traders from the jadeite outcrops, where workshops for preliminary working have been identified.¹²⁵ Surplus household production of salt, at times geographically distant from residences, was carried out along the coast of Belize and the Yucatan. Dynastic Maya control was limited to management and perhaps fees at marketplaces.¹²⁶ Elite management of salt production may have occurred of salt production at Emal in the Post-Classic period,¹²⁷ and perhaps also at Xcambo during the Classic period.

The Collapse of Southern Lowland City-States in the Ninth Century

One by one, over the course of 150 years from about 750 to 900, carved monuments commemorating the dynastic leaders with dates in the Maya long count ceased to be erected in the southern Maya lowlands,¹²⁸ signalling an end to the dynastic political economy and divine kingship at virtually all of the city-states. Among many explanations, warfare, drought, and ecological disaster are touted by different researchers as prime movers in the collapse of the Classic Maya civilization.¹²⁹ These views also are issues of concern in modern societies, so it is not surprising that Maya archaeologists project the potentially deleterious impacts in antiquity too. However, extreme scenarios of massive hunger and people dying in the streets from drought¹³⁰ are not substantiated by field research.¹³¹ Nor did increasing disease and malnutrition figure in the collapse, as indicated by a lack

121 Pendergast, "Maya Mercury."

122 McKillop, *Maya Salt Works*.

123 McKillop, *Search of Maya*.

124 McKillop, *Search of Maya*; Rochette, "Jade in Full."

125 Rochette, "Jade in Full."

126 Chase et al., "Markets among the Ancient Maya"; Jones, "Marketplace at Tikal."

127 Kepecs, "Chickinchel."

128 Martin and Grube, *Chronicle*.

129 Demarest et al., *Terminal Classic*.

130 Gill, *Great Maya Droughts*.

131 Demarest et al., *Terminal Classic*; McKillop, *Ancient Maya*.

of decrease in stature from the Late to Terminal Classic periods at Tikal¹³² and a lack of archaeological evidence for the increase in disease.¹³³

Warfare remains a popular explanation for the collapse. The fragile alliances among lowland Maya city-states were punctuated by battles whose objectives changed by the Late Classic from taking high-ranking captives to annexing the captured polities. When the king of Ceibal was captured by Dos Pilas and held captive for about ten years, Ceibal continued as an independent, albeit politically weak city, until the king was released and allowed to return to rule his city-states. In contrast, when Aguateca was attacked, barricades were established, and the city lay under siege until it was invaded and burned.¹³⁴ Use of the atlatl and fortifications were common by the Terminal Classic in the southern Maya lowlands, with resources barricades to protect cities and sometimes agricultural fields as well, in attempts to fend off invaders.¹³⁵ Advances in decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs at the end of the twentieth century indicate that warfare was common, with military conquests recorded on stelae.

Droughts are known historically in the northern Yucatan from documents and prehistorically from analyses of sediment cores in various locations in the Maya lowlands.¹³⁶ However, the impacts of drought and other climate changes on the ancient Maya civilization and the people's responses are contested. Richardson Gill's published dissertation, *The Great Maya Droughts*, precipitated a deluge of support for drought as a prime mover in the collapse.¹³⁷ A major drought and abandonment of sites did occur during the 150-year time of abandonment of Maya cities (750–900 CE), but determining that the drought occurred before cities were abandoned and that there was a causal relationship has been difficult. There is variability in the climate, with increasing rainfall from the northern part of the Yucatan peninsula to the southern lowlands of Guatemala and Belize, with rainfall up to 200 millimetres per year supporting tropical rainforests. Indeed, it is surprising that the driest area of the northern Maya lowlands flourished after the collapse in the much wetter rainforest setting of the southern Maya lowlands.¹³⁸ Continued climate-change research focuses on fine-tuning the nature and timing of local environmental and cultural changes.¹³⁹

132 Wright, "Biological Perspectives."

133 Wright and White, "Human Biology."

134 Inomata, "Last Day."

135 Demarest, "After the Maelstrom"; Demarest et al., "Defensive Systems"; Webster, *Fall*.

136 Sediment cores in swamps in the Maya area yield pollen that provides a vegetation record, foraminifera and other microfossils that are habitat specific, oxygen isotope data on microfossils that match warming and cooling temperature fluctuations beyond the Maya area, and radiocarbon dates that provide ages to the vegetation and climate changes (Yaegar and Hodell, "Collapse of Maya").

137 Gill, *Great Maya Droughts*.

138 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*.

139 Luzzadder-Beach et al., "Wetland Fields"; Yaegar and Hodell, "Collapse of Maya."

Ecological disaster has remained a popular explanation for the Classic Maya collapse since the 1970s.¹⁴⁰ Shortening the fallow cycle for slash-and-burn agriculture to increase food production led to soil erosion. Increases in population size and urban population densities coincided with various techniques to intensify food production, by terracing hillslopes,¹⁴¹ draining swamps and creating raised fields,¹⁴² and continued use of tree-cropping and kitchen gardens.¹⁴³ Increased food and labour taxation of the common farmers to build and maintain public architecture, the royal courtyard and its dynastic leaders and artisans, exerted increasing pressure on the farmers. In fact, warfare and drought may have contributed to ecological disaster, along with increasing population size and density during the Late Classic period. Although most of the cities in the southern lowlands were abandoned, some people continued to live and farm in the countryside. From an estimated maximum population of 2.6–3.4 million people at 800 CE, the population dropped to 1 million or less by 1000 CE.¹⁴⁴ There was migration of people from the southern lowlands to the coast and to the northern lowlands during the Terminal Classic period (800–900 CE).

Complex human–environmental interactions in the eighth century may have been exacerbated by the rise of coastal trade and a concomitant breakdown in inland trade and commerce, ultimately serving as a catalyst in the collapse of the Classic Maya political economy.¹⁴⁵ Bulk trade of corn and other food at marketplaces both within and beyond a city-state during the Late Classic period in the southern lowlands may have served to stabilize the food supply in times of shortages or surpluses, with rising populations in the Late Classic period.¹⁴⁶ Supplies of food to marketplaces in the downtown Tikal and other Classic Maya cities broke down during the Terminal Classic period. Unlike the Inca, who had warehouses for bulk storage of food and other resources, there is little evidence for warehouses where the dynastic Maya leaders could have stored food for the royal court, for city workers, and for construction workers during labour duty.

International Commerce in the Ninth Century

The collapse of the political economy of divine kingship and abandonment of most southern lowland Maya cities in the Terminal Classic period, marked a change to shared governance, shown by colonnaded buildings and a cessation of dynastic records on stone monuments. Communication outside the Maya area dramatically increased after the Classic Maya collapse during the Postclassic period, when coastal canoe trade around the Yucatan linked with emerging polities in central Mexico, including the Toltec and

140 Culbert, *Classic Maya Collapse*.

141 Chase et al., “Markets among the Ancient Maya.”

142 Turner and Harrison, *Pulltrouser Swamp*.

143 McKillop, “Maya Tree Cropping.”

144 Turner, “Population Reconstruction,” 312.

145 Sabloff and Rathje, *Changing Pre-Columbian*.

146 Eppich and Freidel, “Markets and Marketing.”

later the Aztec states.¹⁴⁷ The nexus for emerging commercial sea trade in the Terminal Classic period was a swampy area along the Gulf of Mexico called Chontalpa, with ports at Xicalanco and Champoton, and at the terminus of several rivers.¹⁴⁸ Importantly, the Usumacinta river was an important transportation route linking the Maya highlands of Guatemala to the south and the Maya lowlands. The Chontalpa traders thrived along the Gulf Coast in the midst of the collapse of the Maya in the southern lowlands. These traders were militarized and opportunistic, supplying emerging elites with luxury goods along coastal trading routes and developing ties with inland sources of commodities, such as obsidian from central Mexico, as well as distinctive Plumbate pottery from the Pacific coast of Chiapas and Guatemala. The heartland of Chontalpa was ideal for growing cotton and cacao, which were widely traded commodities. Controlling access to local resources as well as transport of other resources fuelled the expansion of these traders.

The Chontalpa traders, who are also known as the Itza, expanded their control of sea trade to the salt flats along the north coast of the Yucatan and nearby trading ports such as Isla Cerritos, the coastal port for the inland city of Chichen Itza, some 100 kilometres to the south, where, according to some scholars, they established their capital.¹⁴⁹ The Maya architectural style buildings coexisted at Chichen Itza in the Terminal Classic with Itza-style buildings. In particular, the Temple of the Warriors has lines of round columns on a flat platform, mirroring architecture at Tula, the Toltec capital in central Mexico. Painted murals in the same building depict warriors standing in canoes, although it is unclear if the warriors are invaders. The feathered-serpent motif appears at Chichen Itza at this time as well. The dramatic change in the style of public architecture from Maya to Itza may mirror military invasion and takeover of the northern Maya capital or may reflect copying a new style of a new trading partner through international commerce.

Chichen Itza is dominated by Itza-style architecture, distinct from the smaller public buildings to the south in local Maya style. In fact, the buildings may have been contemporary and coexisting in the late ninth century.¹⁵⁰ Chichen Itza is dominated by buildings in Itza style, similar to those at Tula but likely local copies resulting from successful commercial ventures of the Chontalpa/Itza from the Gulf Coast. Several huge buildings dominate the landscape, including the Castillo, Temple of the Warriors, Court of 1,000 Columns, Mercado, Caracol, and the main ball court. The last building phase of the Castillo has a Mexican-style throne in the room at the top of the four-sided temple with outset staircases on each side. Feathered-serpents adorn the sides of the staircases. The Temple of the Warriors complex resembles Pyramid B at Tula, where columns supported a large flat-roofed meeting area used for returning traders and processions.¹⁵¹

147 Demarest et al., *Terminal Classic*; Freidel, "Culture Areas"; McKillop, *Ancient Maya*; McKillop, "Early Maya Navigation"; Sabloff and Rathje, *Changing Pre-Columbian*.

148 Andrews and Robles Castellanos, "Chichen Itza"; Andrews and Robles Castellanos, "Northern Maya Collapse."

149 Andrews and Robles Castellanos, "Chichen Itza"; Andrews and Robles Castellanos, "Northern Maya Collapse."

150 Kristan-Graham, "Sense of Place."

151 McKillop, *Ancient Maya*, image on 136.

The Caracol, a round-walled building used as an observatory, also combines Maya and Toltec architectural styles.

With their capital at Chichen Itza, Itza aggression along the Caribbean coast is evident at a number of sites from intrusive architectural styles, Itza pottery, and other evidence.¹⁵² Chichen Itza emerged as the major urban centre with connections via sea trade around the Yucatan to the Gulf of Honduras and to the Gulf of Mexico, linking to the Mexican highlands. Water travel along inland waterways and by sea expanded, with prominent cities on inland waterways such as Lamanai, and coastal trading ports, such as Wild Cane Cay, continuing from the Late to the Terminal Classic periods and beyond.¹⁵³ Some sites in northern Belize, including the Northern River Lagoon, Saktunja, and Cayo Coco, were enabled by the emerging commercial canoe trade controlled by Chichen Itza and have ceramic and architectural links to that site.¹⁵⁴ Terminal Classic slate pottery from the northern Yucatan is found at many sites in northern Belize, including Nohmul, Cerros, Colha, NRL, and Saktunja.¹⁵⁵ Large basins with bolstered lips, termed "Fat Polychrome," identified at NRL, Saktunja, and farther south at the Salt Creek site in Midwinter's Lagoon just north of Moho Cay are described as influenced by northern slate-ware forms.¹⁵⁶ Similar vessel forms occur at the Paynes Creek salt works in the far south coast of Belize.¹⁵⁷ Some of this commerce was associated with introduction of obsidian from the Ucareo and Pachuca outcrops in central Mexico to the Maya lowlands. Obsidian blades from both outcrops are found at trading ports along the coast of the Yucatan, including Wild Cane Cay.¹⁵⁸

Round stone buildings or shrines are associated with the spread of the feathered-serpent cult and commerce related to Chichen Itza. The most impressive and largest round structure is the Terminal Classic Caracol at Chichen Itza. Terminal Classic round structures along the Caribbean coast and rivers in Belize are found at Structure 1 at Caye Coco,¹⁵⁹ Structure 9 at Nohmul, Blue Creek, San Juan on Ambergris Cay, Cerros, three sites in the middle Belize river valley, and at three sites in the Sibun river valley contemporary with early Sotuta-phase pottery at Chichen Itza (830–900 CE).¹⁶⁰ The Caracol at Chichen Itza and the round structures in Belize are coeval in date and range from 830 to 900.¹⁶¹ Round structures are also found at Chontal sites on the Gulf of Mexico coast. The round structures have a low, stone wall superstructure that may have been increased in height with poles and an interior room 15 × 12 metres in size. Diasporas of Itza trading

152 Masson, "Maya Collapse Cycles"; McAnany, "Maya Heterodoxy."

153 McKillop, *Search of Maya*; Pendergast, "Stability through Change."

154 Masson and Mock, "Ceramics and Settlement."

155 Masson and Mock, "Ceramics and Settlement," 383–85.

156 Masson and Mock, "Ceramics and Settlement," 387, fig. 17.7d–e.

157 McKillop, *Maya Salt Works*.

158 McKillop et al., "Chemical Source Analysis."

159 Masson and Mock, "Ceramics and Settlement," fig. 17.11.

160 Harrison-Buck and McAnany, "Circular Architecture."

161 Harrison-Buck and McAnany, "Circular Architecture," 301; McAnany, "Classic Maya Heterodoxy."

parties or pilgrimages to Chichen are raised as explanations for the distribution of round structures along the Caribbean coast.¹⁶² Ritual investiture in the cult of Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, by visiting Chichen Itza and returning home with several merchant-priests to build a circular shrine is another possible explanation for shrines, including those at El Tajin on the Gulf Coast of Mexico and inland at Cholula.¹⁶³ In any case, the round structures, slate ware and other fine-paste ceramics record participation in a network of coastal canoe trade centred on Chichen Itza in the ninth century.

Trade between highland areas of central Mexico and the Maya lowlands and around the Yucatan peninsula by boats intensified after the Early Middle Ages with the rise of the Aztecs. From their capital of Tenochtitlan (underneath modern Mexico City), the Aztecs had state-sponsored, long-distance traders called *pochteca*, who were “trader-spies” for the Aztec king. The *pochteca* travelled to distant lands such as the Soconusco region of Pacific Chiapas, where chocolate was grown. The *pochteca* met with local leaders and returned with goods for the Aztec king who decided if long-distance trade or tribute payment from conquering a region was a better option for acquiring chocolate or other goods, including jaguar pelts, quetzal bird feathers, and other rainforest products unavailable in the arid highlands. Late Postclassic Maya sites (1200–1500) obtained copper artefacts from Honduras, gold objects from Panama, and turquoise from the southwestern USA via Aztec trade to the north. The sixteenth-century arrival of the Spaniards in search of gold to help finance European wars brought European diseases and guns that decimated indigenous populations by the sixteenth century. Finding little gold in Mesoamerica, the Spaniards turned their attention to the Inca in Peru, where gold objects were plentiful. Much gold was pillaged and melted as gold blocks to transport to Spain. The centrally organized Aztec state in central Mexico and the Inca state in the southern highlands of Peru were conquered by the Spaniards, but the Maya lacked central organization at that time and were not easily subdued.

Summary

The Early Middle Ages include the height of Late Classic Maya civilization (600–800 CE) as well as the end of divine kingship and abandonment of city-states in the southern Maya lowlands in the ninth century. The Late Classic period was characterized by sixty to eighty city-states with dynastic kings and queens who ruled with the authority of a standing army, and created marriage and other alliances with neighbouring polities, often with elaborate feasts and gifts from high-crafted goods, including some made from exotic resources. The political economy was structured by reciprocal gifting among royalty and other leaders, with tribute of valuable cacao, cotton cloth, and jade, and through extensive marketplace trade. The domestic economy of households focused on subsistence activities but also included surplus production of various commodities that were locally exchanged through reciprocity with kin and also at regular marketplaces, where

162 Harrison-Buck and McAnany, “Circular Architecture.”

163 Ringle, “Political Organization.”

goods and resources from near and distant lands, including valuables such as obsidian and jadeite, could be acquired through currency equivalencies.

Drought, warfare, and ecological disaster are major explanations for the collapse of the Late Classic civilization, although changes in commercialization and expansion of coastal canoe trade controlled by foreign traders certainly contributed to the collapse.¹⁶⁴ The Maya were resilient to prior droughts, had negotiated alliances and survived centuries of warfare, and managed their agricultural landscape successfully, such that drought, warfare, and ecological disaster appear insufficient as prime movers in this cultural change. The expansion of the Chontal Itza traders from their ports on the Gulf Coast of Mexico to the north-coast salt flats, Chichen Itza's coastal trading port of Isla Cerritos, and ultimately inland some 100 kilometres to Chichen, caused a major disruption in access to goods and resources. Chichen Itza became centre of commercial control of a vast circum-Yucatan canoe trade, with Itza architecture and feathered-serpent ideology spread with trade along the east coast of the Caribbean to trading ports and inland sites on waterways, where Chontal Itza-style round shrines were built, imported pottery introduced, and the coastal economy expanded.

Warfare, diplomacy, bulk trade, commerce, climate change, and disease are factors that contributed to the origins, development, and collapse of the Maya civilization. Although disease has been discounted as a factor in the Classic Maya collapse,¹⁶⁵ it was only the introduction of European diseases in the sixteenth century that decimated the population in the Maya area and throughout the Americas. Droughts are documented at the end of the Preclassic (300 CE) and Early Classic (600 CE) periods, and during the Terminal Classic (800–900 CE) they are associated with abandonment of large Preclassic centres, political turmoil in the Classic, and the long collapse of the city-states, respectively. Droughts are linked with the Venezuela climate record and events elsewhere, but the timing and impact of droughts on the Maya culture remain debated.¹⁶⁶

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164 Sabloff and Turner, "Classic Period Collapse."

165 Wright, "Biological Perspectives."

166 Yaeger and Hodell, "Collapse of Maya"; Sabloff and Turner, "Classic Period Collapse."

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PART TWO
PROCESSES

Chapter 16

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Richard L. Smith

Introduction

Teachers of traditional courses in Western civilization have often found it difficult to be enthusiastic about the three centuries between 600 and 900 CE. These were the “Dark Ages,” and Europe was still feeling the reverberations from the momentous “fall” of the Roman empire, now characterized more as a “transition,” that had been transpiring since the third century. Migration and invasion by tribal peoples from the hinterland, institutional breakdown, and a decline in public order had all been manifestations of this process. Underlying it were larger considerations including climatic deterioration and a demographic downturn that became a catastrophe in the sixth century with a pandemic often referred to as the Plague of Justinian. Fewer people in a pre-industrial economy meant fewer producers and consumers and thus a drop in economic activity. And the decline was across the board. The demand for artisanal and industrial goods plunged, and the amount of cultivated land contracted. Prosperity decreased, and poverty increased. The surviving urban areas were generally administrative or ecclesiastical rather than commercial centres. Infrastructure, especially roads, was not maintained, and much of the transportation system collapsed. The market economy itself was disassembled and in some places practically disintegrated; advanced sectors like banking disappeared. The monetary system floundered, and more primitive forms of exchange like barter and gift-giving were revived. Long-distance trade was confined to luxury and prestige goods, and even interregional markets disappeared.

Or so this worst-case scenario version of the Early Middle Ages has often been presented. Historians who have taken a closer look have tried to paint a more nuanced view.¹ Different places at different times had different experiences. Along with the big downswing there were many smaller upswings, and deep down new forces for change were starting to bubble. The real problem with this discussion is that Europe just wasn't a very important place for trade and commerce or most other matters historians deal with in the period between 600 and 900. In more important places there was nothing dark about this time; for trade and commerce, it was one of history's most luminous ages. Driving this both overland and maritime were two great empires on either side of Eurasia: Tang China in the east and the Islamic caliphate in the west.²

¹ Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*; McCormick, *Origins*; Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*.

² For the geographic location of the most important regions and places mentioned in this chapter, see Map 17.

The Economy of Tang China

Chinese history does not run in cycles, but it is fair to say that an obvious pattern is evident at least since the Qin unification. Periods of strong, centralized, imperial rule are marked off from each other by periods of political fragmentation often characterized by civil war, social revolution, and foreign invasion. The assumption that economic decline follows political fragmentation seems intuitive: war and upheaval make it difficult for producers to produce and traders to trade. While this was not always true, during the longest period of fragmentation between the Han and Tang dynasties, economic conditions were generally not favourable. Han power dissolved in the early third century, after which northern and southern China went their separate ways, with the north experiencing a prolonged period of turmoil and instability. Trade and commerce do not require strong, centralized government even in China, but they do favour conditions in which there is some semblance of order and security and a reasonable level of predictability. Banditry, piracy, corruption, plunder by rulers or passing armies, and an absence of custom or law governing the marketplace will deter commercial activity. So will the lack of an adequate customer base. By the third century, China was experiencing a demographic downturn probably due to epidemic disease, and by the fourth century warfare and insecurity were chronic. The circulation of money declined; during some periods no coins were minted. Grain and textiles were often used as commodity money, or people used old debased coins or gold and silver for larger transactions.³ To add to the misery, North China became open to incursions by tribesmen from beyond the Great Wall that were part of the larger movement of migrations and invasions then occurring across Eurasia.

In China itself, the internal economy began to improve beginning in the late fifth century as witnessed by an increase in the volume of trade between the north and south.⁴ China was a huge place with potentially a huge economy that produced commodities the rest of the world wanted. It had distinct assets, foremost of which was a rich agricultural base on which a productive industrial sector could be built. It also had a governing class that was anxious to provide itself with luxury items from beyond its borders. In South China the situation was somewhat less dreadful than in the north, since it did not face the perpetual menace of tribal invasion. But it did have its own problems: rebellions and piracy were chronic, and the great aristocratic families hampered attempts at government efficiency. Nevertheless, this was a period of growth as the wet-rice system of cultivation spread across southern farmlands, resulting in a great increase in food production accompanied by a corresponding population rise. Trade and commerce grew steadily especially along the Yanzi river and on the coast at Guangzhou (Canton), where an increasing number of foreign merchants came to do business.

Nevertheless, for China's foreign trade, doing business still meant mostly overland into the silk roads system. In the centuries since the Han, silk-road trade had fallen off considerably due to on and off episodes of instability and insecurity, with the fifth century

3 Peng, *Monetary History*, 233.

4 Ebrey, *History of China*, 105.

being a true time of troubles, although through it all the system never disintegrated. Even in the worst of times some routes had remained open, and some traders had continued to bring merchandise into and out of China. The elites who governed China still demanded luxury goods such as jewellery from western sources and horses for their militaries while their counterparts to the west were still eager to import Chinese products. A disaster in one place might open an opportunity in another. If profits were high enough, merchants found ways to succeed despite great challenges. Even though volume might vary widely, supply and demand trumped almost all obstacles.

In 589, a new dynasty, the Sui, unified China. The founder, Yang Jian, proved a frugal ruler, and under him China prospered. His son, Yang Guang, however, was overly ambitious. In a flurry of activity, he began construction of the Grand Canal connecting the river systems of North and South China, ordered thousands of new ships to be constructed for use on the rivers, and rebuilt a second capital at Luoyang. In 609, the government proclaimed that foreign merchants were welcome to do business in China, and, according to an official chronicle, they “came and went without stop till the prefectures and commanderies they passed on the way were exhausted by the work of receiving and escorting them in and out.”⁵ Meanwhile, native Chinese merchants were treated as a degraded class forced to wear black as a sign of their low status and prohibited by sumptuary regulations from displaying any indications of their wealth, including the size of their houses.⁶ The hearty encouragement the Sui afforded to overland trade in the northwest was not matched in the south. Geography dictated that South China would not have direct access to Central Asian routes, but even indirect access had dried up during the post-Han period. The bamboo road, an ancient route that ran from Sichuan to Yunnan, Burma, and eventually India, never connected into southeastern China.⁷ For it, there was only the sea as an outlet to the world, and its people had long been in contact with the littoral peoples to their south. Monsoon trade routes brought ships across the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal to insular and peninsular Southeast Asia. From there, in the early first millennium, goods were offloaded and taken overland by portage to the Gulf of Thailand. By the fourth century, ships were avoiding this expensive inconvenience by using a newly opened water route through the Strait of Melaka.⁸ The carriers were maritime folk, a mixture of Malays, Chams, and other Southeast Asians intermingled with Indians on one side and coastal Chinese on the other.

The Sui, however, were landlubbers from the northwest, and their power base was far into the interior of the Chinese land mass. In their brief moment of glory, they never broke clear from their inland frontier mentality. Across the land, the second emperor spent too much too quickly on too many projects. While the Grand Canal would prove to be a tremendous asset, its benefits were long-term rather than immediate. Renewed work on the Great Wall, hardly a cost-efficient defence strategy, was accompanied

5 Wang, “Nanhai Trade,” 70.

6 Twitchett, “Merchant, Trade,” 67, 92.

7 Yang, “Horses, Silver,” 315–17.

8 Smith, “All-Water Route.”

by military colonies established along the trade routes and garrisons settled on the frontiers. The strain of supplying this huge establishment went far towards exhausting the treasury. The government tried to cover its deficit by debasing the coinage, resulting in inflation. Among the common people grain prices rose; among the elite the prices for luxury goods skyrocketed due to the court's own insatiable appetite. Following a disastrous war with the state of Koguryō (straddling modern North Korea and south Manchuria), the Sui dynasty was overthrown in 618 CE.

The early phase of the Tang dynasty, which replaced the Sui, was characterized by stable and effective government, and the economy grew enormously. Improvements in agriculture and the opening of new lands in the south led to abundant harvests and low prices. The opening of the Grand Canal helped create a nationwide system of bulk commodity distribution.⁹ Urbanization and population growth followed. On the external scene, China became more integrated into the world economic order as a producer of goods desired by others and as a consumer of desirable products from elsewhere. The robust Chinese economy served as an engine propelling the circulation of commodities across Eurasia. Under the Tang, the Chinese economy became the largest in the world and remained so for centuries thereafter.¹⁰

Tang society showed a marked interest in foreign peoples, ideas, and goods that was rare during other periods of Chinese history. The attraction to exotica in court circles trickled down through the elite and into the urban classes, stimulating long-distance trade. This is not to imply that the Tang government encouraged the free-wheeling acquisition of foreign commodities on the open market. Imports deemed especially rare were restricted for sale to the court. As the economy became increasingly commercialized, all foreign and large-scale internal trade was put under tight government control. In a system originating in the Han period, merchants and other travellers were monitored by being obligated to obtain passes to be presented to local officials on arrival at a new place.¹¹

Nor was government policy geared to give advantage to native merchants. Those engaged in trade and commerce were generally free to earn whatever they could within certain bounds, but their wealth was not to be used as a source for gaining political or social power. Most overland long-distance trade continued to be conducted by non-Chinese, especially the Sogdians, a mercantile people from Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Transoxania region of Central Asia.¹² As the need for revenue grew, the state came to hog a substantial portion of the commercial economy for itself by imposing monopolies over the production and distribution of such items as salt. And the government collected most of its taxes in the form of grain and textiles, which had to be reintegrated into the economy, giving it control over these commodities above the local level. The most important form of government intrusion came with the official markets system,

9 Clark, *Community, Trade*, 34–35.

10 Adshead, *T'ang China*, 68–69.

11 Hansen, *Silk Road*, 36–37, 165.

12 Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 119–62.

likewise not a Tang invention since elements of it went back again to the Han. The government established official markets in cities, allowing it to maintain direct control over the portals leading into and out of interregional and long-distance trade.¹³ All commercial transactions were to be held in designated spaces within the walls of cities where markets opened and closed at set times.

For all of its unwelcome interference in the workings of the free market, the official system did impose some structure and consumer protection. It maintained law and order, designated the location of shops, and enforced a standard system of weights and measurements. Merchandise was evaluated according to three levels of quality, and prices were fixed monthly. Shabby, damaged, and fake goods were rejected or confiscated, and transactions in certain goods had to be registered. Fraudulent and unfair practices such as price fixing, forming cartels, and extorting from merchants were dealt with by officials who had the authority to carry out punishments, mostly in the form of floggings. In practice, however, the official market system never measured up to the ideal that was set for it. Some markets were more regulated than others even when they were in the same city.¹⁴ In contrast to the larger cities, most local markets were generally ignored since the government lacked the means of enforcement in such places. As the economy expanded and diversified, it outgrew the official system, which finally collapsed in the late eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁵

As part of their effort to assume more control over the economy, the Tang undertook the daunting task of standardizing the currency and stabilizing the value of coins. New cash was issued, which proved to be so suitable for use in the marketplace that it would serve as a model for later dynasties.¹⁶ However, the production of new coins never caught up to the needs of a booming commerce. The use of old debased coins was abolished, but this resulted in fewer coins in circulation. Some people returned to cloth and grain as a basis for calculating prices, and in 732 the government actually ordered merchants to accept textiles along with coins as money. Despite such setbacks, after much effort, the Chinese economy was on its way to becoming monetized. Unfortunately, political instability in the later Tang period led people to hoard coins, causing a new round of shortages.¹⁷

The Tang was often pressed for revenues as a result of its aggressive foreign policy. The big push came in the northwest, where Tang expansion pumped new life into the silk-roads system. From Central Asia and lands to the west came products ranging from lapis lazuli and silver to carpets and furs. Nevertheless, Chinese control over the trade routes reaching into Central Asia was no more successful as an economic policy than building the Great Wall had been as a defensive policy. Both cost much more than they were worth, although cost analysis did not necessarily win the day at court. Much of the

13 Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an*, 166–70; Twitchett, “Tang Market System.”

14 Xiong, *Sui-Tang Chang'an*, 170.

15 Twitchett, “Merchant, Trade,” 95.

16 Jen, *Chinese Cash*, 39.

17 Peng, *Monetary History*, 274.

new commerce that was stimulated was actually a result of supplying and supporting Chinese troop presence. Since the Chinese government collected taxes in the form of silk and in turn paid troops and officials in part with rolls of silk, a huge quantity of this particular commodity flowed to the northwest frontier and inevitably beyond. Under these particular conditions at this time, silk did, indeed, power the silk roads.¹⁸

The Origins of the Caliphate

In 500 CE, China was barely inching towards unification, while in India the very idea that the subcontinent could somehow be reconstituted as a single state was nearly inconceivable. The Roman empire in the west had collapsed, and its heir in the east, the Byzantine empire, wavered. One state still appeared strong and vigorous among the settled lands of Eurasia: the Persian empire under the Sasanian dynasty (224–650 CE). By a process of elimination, it had become the dominant superpower, and the sixth century would represent its apex. Heirs to a great imperial tradition that went back to the Achaemenid dynasty (550–331 BCE), the Sasanians survived the disruptive era of invasions and migrations that brought down other Eurasian empires. The Sasanian government looked favourably on commerce, and the entrepreneurs who drove Persia's commerce constituted an important class. Some amassed considerable wealth.¹⁹ The major asset Persia enjoyed was its geographical position right in the middle of the east–west land routes and at the terminus of Indian Ocean commerce through the Persian Gulf. From the east came silk and spices, from the west glassware, from the south aromatics, and from the north furs, as well as dozens of other products from all points.²⁰ The Sasanian empire's major rival—indeed much of the time its sworn enemy—was also its neighbour and sometimes trading partner, the Byzantine empire. The enmity was an ancient one. The Romans had fought both immediate predecessors of the Sasanians, the Seleucids and the Parthians, before taking on the Sasanians. Control of the great trading centre of Nisibis (Nusaybin near the eastern border of modern Turkey and Syria) was a focal point of much of the contentiousness, and in peacetime legal trade across the frontier was restricted to Nisibis.²¹ Later, two other trading centres were opened, one at Callinica in Syria and the other at Artaxa (Artachat) in Armenia. This was specified by treaty to make certain all customs duties were collected and to prevent espionage. Since both sides knew the other used merchants as spies, caravans were not allowed to penetrate into each other's territory.²²

For two states that were natural trading partners and had little to fight over other than who would get the advantage in matters of trade and commerce, the Sasanian and

¹⁸ Hansen, *Silk Road*, 82, 237.

¹⁹ Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, 17.

²⁰ Prickett, "Durable Goods," 71; Siriweera, "Precolonial Sri Lanka," 126; Kiribamune, "Muslims and the Trade," 180; Martin, *Treasure*, 6; Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures*, 3.

²¹ Retso, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 457; Boulnois, *Silk Roads*, 237.

²² Procopius, *De Bellis*, I.21.2; McCormick, *Origins*, 591.

Byzantine empires harboured a remarkable animosity towards each other. The silk-roads system came out of Central Asia to drop below the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus mountains, and the Black Sea, which meant that the Sasanian empire controlled a long stretch of it. The Persians provided watering and resting places for caravans as well as security—but for a price: Persian merchants profited as middlemen, and the Sasanian government reaped great wealth from taxes. The only ways around the Persian empire were overland to the far north using the steppe roads system from the Black Sea to the Tian Shan mountains, running somewhat parallel to the silk roads, or down the Red Sea from Egypt to the Indian Ocean. Both were less direct than heading straight from Byzantine into Persian territory and usually less safe but were often used when Sasanian exactions became too onerous.²³

The Sasanians had to walk a tightrope squeezing the maximum profit out of the trade while reigning in their greed just shy of provoking the Byzantines into war. A Sasanian blockade of the Byzantines would have negated the role of middleman; a Byzantine blockade of Persian trade would have made more sense except that the Byzantine elites and the opulent religious establishment they supported were addicted to silk and other eastern luxuries. Geopolitical, military, and dynastic considerations were usually foremost in directing both Sasanian and Byzantine foreign policies, but commercial interests were often factored in. What emperors and generals wanted and what benefited merchants often coincided. A vicious tit-for-tat raged with the Byzantines seeking to open new routes to the east and the Sasanians seeking to close them. When they could find partners, the Byzantines welcomed the opportunity to deal through middlemen, which at various times included Ethiopians, Arabs, Türks, and Indians—anyone but the hated Persians.²⁴

Trouble with the Byzantines in the west does not appear to have impacted negatively on Persian commerce elsewhere. The Sasanians benefited from the gradual shift in east-west trade that was evolving as maritime connections picked up more business at the expense of the overland routes. From control over Oman, the Persians came to dominate maritime traffic from Aden in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula to the Konkan Coast of India. Colonies of Persian merchants were scattered around, perhaps as far as the Malay Peninsula,²⁵ but the island of Sri Lanka was the hub for Persian commerce. Cosmas Indicopleustes writing in the mid sixth century notes that the harbour there was “a great mart for the people in those parts” and that it was much frequented by ships “from the remotest countries, I mean Tzinita [China] and other trading places, [from which] it receives silk, aloes, cloves, sandalwood and other products and these again are passed on to marts on this side.”²⁶ Actually the last three products probably originated in Southeast Asia, but certainly the silk was from China. Ships that one Chinese

23 Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographia Christiana*, 368–69; Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, 156.

24 Menander Protector, *Historia*, 110–23, 173–75; Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures*, 153–54; Liu, *Silk Roads*, 75.

25 Colless, “Persian Merchants,” 21.

26 Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographia Christiana*, 365–66.

observer identified as Persian were in Guangzhou in 671, and Persian merchants were doing business there in noticeable numbers by 738.²⁷

In the late sixth century, the western sector of the high-end long-distance luxury trade was still in decline. Western Europe continued heading downward, and economic problems in the Byzantine empire left little surplus wealth from which to generate demand. The Sasanian empire itself was experiencing internal discord characterized by sporadic rebellion. In part to distract his increasingly restless subjects, the king, Khusraw II Parvez (590–622 CE), launched an all-out war against the Byzantines in 602.²⁸ This proved to be an extremely destructive, mutually exhausting struggle. By its end in 629, both empires lay prostrate, the Byzantines having barely survived, the Sasanians mortally wounded if not yet officially dead. Certain kinds of war can help to stimulate certain kinds of trade although in most instances all-out war has proved to be a more destructive than constructive force in advancing commerce. This war proved to be a lose-lose situation.

The central theatre of war in the Persian–Byzantine conflicts had been the Syria–Mesopotamia area, but a secondary theatre lay to the south, marked by the Arabian Peninsula and the seas around it. Historically, the Arabian Peninsula had not been a favourite place for empires to fight over. Most of Arabia was desiccated and underpopulated, deficient in agricultural and forest resources. Tribes could unite into confederations to exercise trading advantages over an expanded area or to fight common enemies, often over trade issues. Control of trade routes was one of the most important considerations in inter-clan and inter-confederation relations.²⁹ But tribal confederations did not evolve into centralized states. Parts of Arabia had settled populations, including the oasis towns of the Hijaz in western Arabia that were strung together as part of a trade-route system now collectively referred to as the incense road. As for commodities, ancient authors, including Strabo and Diodorus Siculus, were particularly impressed by the significant quantities of gold mined in various places.³⁰ The big trade, however, had been in frankincense and myrrh, gum resins used as incense in religious ceremonies and funerals or made into perfumes, scented oils, ointments, and medicines. Forests of myrrh and frankincense grew across the coastal regions of Hadramaut and Dhufar, and myrrh also came from Somalia.³¹

The incense road officially started in the city of Shabwah, the capital of Hadramaut, although much of the frankincense came via the port of Qana, lying directly to the east. At Shabwah it was taxed, then carried west by a people classical authors referred to as the “Minaeans,” who appear to have enjoyed a monopoly over the southern sector of

27 Ashtor, *Social and Economic*, 107; Spuler, “Eastern Islamic Countries,” 14.

28 Kennedy, *Prophet*, 13.

29 Strabo, *Geographica*, XVI.4.2; Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 40–41; Retso, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 357–58.

30 Strabo, *Geographica*, XVI.4.18; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, II.50.1.

31 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XII.30.52–XII.32.65; Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 152–54, 165–68; Retso, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 404.

the incense road. Passing through Tumna (Hayd Kohlan), caravans headed to Marib, the most important city in this part of Arabia, where they finally turned north. As much as was practical, the rest of the trip was something of a beeline from Nagram in the south to Petra in the north, hopping from oasis to oasis, then to Gaza on the Mediterranean, and finally to Alexandria. Here the incense was processed before being sent on to Rome and other markets, much of it to be burned. The trip was reported to be over sixty-seven stages, each stage roughly a day's travel but sometimes reckoned from watering point to watering point. The alternative to the incense road was the Red Sea. Despite its navigational hazards, this maritime route had enjoyed the best of times under Roman protection. But the route's redeeming grace was lost when Byzantine naval power became concentrated in the Mediterranean, and piracy in the Red Sea became endemic. Merchants with cargoes that attempted to circumvent the Red Sea passage by making early landfall on its western shore found the inland routes to the Nile unprotected, and the territory they passed through often in chaos. As the Byzantine historian Procopius indicates, for the time being the Red Sea was not the preferred means of getting goods to the Mediterranean.³² Overall, as the Roman empire declined, so did the demand for frankincense, myrrh, and other expensive luxuries over both land and sea routes.³³

This left various desert tracks across Arabia, the most prominent of which was a more modest version of the incense road. Along it, marketplaces and commercial hubs did a brisk business, and Arabian middlemen prospered, although not to the degree of the earlier era. The transit trade continued as the most viable alternative for transporting whatever goods were exchanged between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. While many commercial centres withered, others survived, and a few prospered, including the city of Mecca in the western Hijaz, which had originated as a haram, a religious shrine, and pilgrimage destination.³⁴ Mecca took off in the fifth century with the appearance of a new group from the north, the Quraysh, who organized the town's trade into fairs and eventually controlled the caravan traffic. They are reported to have forged a series of treaties allowing Meccan caravans to travel to Iraq and Syria. But the bulk of Mecca's commerce was in basic goods produced in Arabia on the way to somewhere else in Arabia. Skins and dates had replaced frankincense and myrrh.

The trade of Mecca would be a footnote in history along with that of dozens of similar cities scattered across the Afro-Eurasian world except that Mecca was the birthplace of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Muhammad grew up in a business environment. His father had died on a trading expedition, and he was raised by an uncle who was a merchant. He married a wealthy businesswoman, Khadiya, for whom he organized and led caravans. Muhammad's father-in-law from a later wife, the first caliph, Abu Bakr, was a cloth merchant, and many of Muhammad's early followers in Medina and Mecca were involved in commerce as were many of his enemies. From the outset, Islam recognized trade as an honourable profession provided those involved played by certain

32 Procopius, *De Bellis*, I.19.24.

33 Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 162.

34 Bennison, *Great Caliphs*, 58; Kennedy, *Prophet*, 26.

rules. Early Muslims used the system of commercial ties and contacts the Quraysh had established to spread their religion. A year after Muhammad died, his followers attacked the two regional superpowers of the day: for both empires, however, the super had been drained from the superpower. Between 637 and 654, the Sasanian empire was conquered outright.³⁵ Somehow a sizeable remnant of the Byzantine empire survived, leaving the old eastern Roman state and the new Arab state at dagger points across a contentious frontier.

The Economy of the Umayyad Caliphate

The government that ruled the Islamic empire in the centuries following the death of the Prophet became known as the caliphate. Caliphs were considered the successors of God's messenger and, as such, the leaders of the Muslim community. Initially they were chosen by consensus from within the community, but, beginning with the fifth caliph, Muawiyah I (661–680 CE), the empire came under the rule of a dynasty, the Umayyad. The caliphate capital became Damascus, and for a while Syria assumed the role of commercial hub. The Umayyad family had been merchants in Mecca, and traders and soldiers continued to constitute the bedrock of support for the caliphate. Arab soldiers were often demobilized and settled in garrisons, some of which, like Basra, evolved into cities.

Because the Arab conquest was relatively quick and lacked the destruction that characterized either the long and drawn-out Byzantine–Sasanian struggle or the calamitous invasions of western Europe, no catastrophic shock impacted on the economic system. The infrastructure remained largely intact, most urban centres survived, and the production of goods was not interrupted.³⁶ Once the empire had been consolidated, it imposed peace and order over a large area extending from the shores of the Atlantic to the border of India. Nevertheless, for the lands of the Islamic heartland, the existence of the Umayyad caliphate did not signal an immediate economic boom. In many places, local variables now determined success or failure as commerce became more regionalized. Trading systems had to be reoriented as borders shifted. While the old frontier separating Syria and Iraq along the upper Euphrates, for example, was eased, a new one separating Syria and Anatolia now appeared. Because the capital of the caliphate was Damascus, this stimulated economic activity and brought prosperity to parts of Syria. However, regions to the north and east that had been major centres of olive oil and wine production were severely depressed by the loss of the Anatolian market.³⁷ Trade with Egypt, a mainstay of Levant commerce since the days of the pharaohs and Phoenicians, became a minor affair.

The Umayyad state never officially disapproved of trade, nor was its elite stand-offish from it, unlike the governing classes in China, where Confucianist ideology considered trade and commerce as parasitic because it produced nothing, and Europe, where

³⁵ Lapidus, *Islamic Societies*, 41.

³⁶ Walmsley, "Production, Exchange," 299, 304, 318; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, 357.

³⁷ Walmsley, "Production, Exchange," 265–343.

Christianity was suspicious towards the making of too much wealth unless it was to be spent for Christian approved purposes.³⁸ The urban civilization that had characterized the Roman empire survived better in the East than in the West, and the society the Arabs inherited featured large prosperous urban centres to which new cities were subsequently added. This had not been a poor society. Much of the old commercial elite survived and retained its wealth while the new Muslim elite joined it in demanding special goods befitting their positions.

Given its origins and size, the new state should have been proactively trade friendly; however, commercial issues were not at the forefront in the decision-making process of this government. The Umayyad caliphate lasted only a century, during which time the overwhelming focus was on expansion. In particular circumstances, commercial considerations undoubtedly impacted on political and military decisions, but they did not drive the overall policy of conquest; other forces within the Islamic movement were responsible for that. If the Umayyads appeared to support trade, it came as part of more strategic decisions to strengthen the state and the dynasty. The infrastructure—in particular the road system—was one obvious beneficiary. The government's main intention in expanding and maintaining the transportation and communication networks was not to promote trade but rather to dispatch orders and official information.³⁹ Nevertheless, an enlarged and greatly improved road system when combined with capital projects programmes, including the expansion of marketplaces, caravanserais, and qaghans, greatly stimulated commercial activity in the later Umayyad period. The expansion of the old mercantile networks into a new politically unified and ever enlarging geographical space extended commercial tentacles from the capital to the provincial cities and from there into more modest towns. Both on the elite and mass-produced levels, demand stimulated the production of manufactured and artisanal goods.

Perhaps the most direct impact Umayyad government policy had on commerce resulted from the monetary reform of the fifth caliph, 'Abd al-Mālik (685–705 CE). The Byzantine and Sasanian empires had used separate systems. The Byzantine was based on a gold coin, the numisma (denarius aureus), that descended from the Roman solidus and contained 4.55 grams of gold. Sasanian coinage went back to the Greek system based on the silver drachma and was recognized for its purity (85–90 percent). Following the Arab conquest, local authorities continued the system in use in a given place. Byzantine and Sasanian coins circulated, and Arab governors struck their own coins. Between 696 and 699, 'Abd al-Mālik brought the Byzantine and Persian models together into one standardized bimetallic system in which 20 silver dirhams equalled 1 gold dinar. The dinar weighed one *mithqal* or 4.25 grams, the dirham ultimately set at 2.97 grams. Both gold and silver coins were well struck using a standardized formula for date and mint.⁴⁰

38 Twitchett, "Merchant, Trade," 64–65; Brown, *Eye of a Needle*, 54–58; Zacour, *Medieval Institutions*, 54–55; Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures*, 239; Lapidus, *Islamic Societies*, 45–46.

39 Walmsley, "Production, Exchange," 304.

40 Album, *Islamic Coins*, 20.

Eventually the dinar and dirham would become accepted from the shores of the Atlantic to the eastern shore of the Indian Ocean and the borders of China.

The trade zones to the west, around the northern Mediterranean basin and into Europe, had been in steady decline since the Roman empire had started its slide downward. A modest port-to-port regional trade functioned in some areas, but the large-scale transport of bulk goods across the sea was gone.⁴¹ The Arab conquest of the southern Mediterranean rim from Syria to Spain did not cause this decline, which had started much earlier. European problems were hardly the result of nefarious Umayyad policies designed to undermine Christian commerce: the Umayyads were just not that clever. Some limited trade particularly in luxury goods continued between the caliphate and parts of Europe, but western Europe had become a backwater; its most in-demand commodity was slaves. Had no religious-inspired antagonism existed, western Europe still would not have been much of a trading partner for the caliphate. North Africa, however, had been an integral part of the old Mediterranean system, and had suffered from invasion, urban decline, and a reversion to nomadism in some places. But as part of the new imperial state North Africa had considerable potential from the nascent trans-Saharan system, which would open a hitherto untapped zone of trade reaching into the interior of West Africa.

Closer at hand was the Byzantine empire. The Byzantine court, church, and elite classes still generated a demand for eastern commodities although they would prefer not to buy them from the Arabs, just as in earlier times they had preferred not to deal with the Sasanians. This led to an increase in maritime links across the Black Sea, from where merchants could travel overland into the steppe roads system.⁴² And even during periods when Umayyad-Byzantine relations were at their lowest, some merchandise seeped across the Syrian-Anatolian border or came indirectly by ship to Constantinople. If trade with the northern rim of the Mediterranean remained stagnant, the new empire did tie its southern and eastern shores to the commerce of the Indian Ocean.⁴³ Again, this reorientation of long-distance trade systems cannot be attributed to some blueprint devised by the Umayyad elite. The Umayyads and other prominent early Muslim families sprang from overland traders, and the empire was largely the creation of northern Arabs who had little interest in the Indian Ocean. Persians, not Arabs, continued to dominate maritime trade from the Persian Gulf to the eastern seas although with the recognition that trading towns of the gulf had a mixed population of Persians and Arabs. Overland, the Arab military expansion eastward followed old paths along the silk roads with the objective of seizing control over the cities and caravan routes of Central Asia.

By the mid eighth century, the Umayyad caliphate comprised three disparate parts: much of the eastern sector of the Byzantine empire and the southern sector of the old Roman empire, the entire Sasanian empire, and Central Asia. Each had been a discrete commercial zone having limited contacts with the other two. The new empire was

41 Reynolds, *Western Mediterranean*; Kinsley, "Mapping Trade," 31-36.

42 Franck, *Silk Road*, 190.

43 Labib, "Capitalism," 80.

an overlay of intersecting commercial zones, each containing resource deposits, production hubs, and centres of consumption in which sophisticated and wealthy classes had established tastes for products that came from far away. The caliphate covered an area where established trade networks had been in operation for millennia. Some had to be refashioned, redirected, or reconnected, but rarely rebuilt. Persian and Sogdian routes stretched to China and India, and the Umayyads sent embassies to the Chinese court as the Sasanians had done before them; Egyptian contacts extended up the Nile into the interior of Africa; old Roman roads crossed Spain and North Africa; Berber caravans were beginning to penetrate the Sahara to the Senegal and Niger valleys; and sea routes woven by Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, Arabs, Indians, and Malays in times past could take a merchant sailor across the Indian Ocean and into the South China Sea.

It would take time for all of this seemingly indigestible mass of commercial potential to become an integrated unity, a core serving as the engine driving trade across the western and central heart of Eurasia. The revival of trade and commerce under the Umayyads, however, was based far less on international exchange than on the internal market. The caliphate was so large and diverse it amounted to a commercial world unto itself. A hoard from Damascus dating to the end of the Umayyad period contained coins mostly minted in Damascus and Iraq but also from as far away as al-Andalus (Spain), Ifrīqiyya (Tunisia), Armenia, Kirmān (in south-central Iran), and Harat (in western Afghanistan).⁴⁴ Nor was the growth of commerce limited to elite commodities travelling over long distances. As the monetary economy percolated deep into local marketplaces, hinterlands were stimulated to produce surpluses for city markets and specialized goods for inclusion into regional and interregional exchange systems, including agricultural products like cotton and sugar.⁴⁵

Trade and commerce in the Umayyad caliphate were still a work in progress in the mid-eighth century when time ran out. The Umayyad empire had never enjoyed political rest; Arab factions competed for power, and eventually Persians, Levantines, Egyptians, Berbers, Central Asians, and Türks joined in. Between 743 and 750, the government began an irreversible slide as various groups jostled for power. The Umayyad mindset had become too restricted, its focus too narrow and short-sighted, to direct the complex, multi-ethnic, world-spanning Community of All Believers. The rising against the Umayyads was led by the ‘Abbāsids, who claimed descent from an uncle of Muhammad. Under their black banners they marched through Iraq, capturing Damascus in 750. A new caliphate was born: the world of commerce was about to spike.

The Heyday of Tang–‘Abbāsīd Trade

From the early eighth to the ninth century, the imperial powers of the day in the central and eastern realms of Eurasia had been engaged in a gigantic struggle to determine who would control the silk roads. Other motives were mixed in including matters of security,

⁴⁴ al-Ush, *Silver Hoard*.

⁴⁵ Walmsley, "Production, Exchange," 265–343.

dynastic prestige, religion (not for the Chinese), strategic position, and naked power, but in one sense this can be seen as one of the great trade wars in history. Actually, it was a series of complicated on-and-off conflicts with multiple shifts of alliances. Only the goals of the participants remained unchanged. The major players came from different directions: the Chinese from the east; the Arabs from the west; the Tibetans from the south; and the Türks from the north. The Arabs were bringing Islam, but commercially as well as geopolitically they were heirs to the Persian empire, which had anchored the western end of the silk roads system for centuries.

The year after Damascus fell to the 'Abbāsids, the Arab army pushing eastward in Central Asia smashed into a Chinese army pushing westward. Both had the support of different Turkic tribes and local principalities. This proved to be a one-battle war. On the banks of the Talas river (on the border of the modern states of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) the armies mauled each other for five days until one group of Türks supporting the Chinese switched sides, exposing the Chinese position.⁴⁶ The Battle of Talas has become one of the most storied engagements in Asian military history, but its strategic importance does not match its notability. The Arab army did not follow up its victory with a full-fledged invasion of the Tarim Basin, which henceforth became a frontier zone separating the Chinese and Islamic worlds. The Chinese, however, never again seriously attempted to control Central Asia and its trade routes, but this was less a consequence of the Battle of Talas than of other events that started inside China a few years later.

The Tang represents the last great period of northern China's dominance over southern China. Since the rise of Chinese civilization, the nucleus of the state, culture, and economy had been in the northwest. Environmental conditions in that region, however, were changing; it was becoming drier and colder, not auspicious for an agricultural-based economy. In increasing numbers, people had moved south where there was a bountiful supply of land and plenty of rainfall. Unsettled political and social conditions added to the ecological downturn in encouraging this migration. The south's more productive agriculture together with its convenient river transportation system led to a great expansion in the internal markets of the region. River cities fed into coastal ports looking towards the South China Sea. Under the Tang, the greatest of the maritime ports was Guangzhou located at the point where monsoon winds brought sailing ships.⁴⁷ On the northern side of Guangzhou was an elaborate transportation system that connected to the rest of the country. To the south of Guangzhou, in the vicinity of modern Hanoi, was Jiaozhi, a Chinese outpost useful as an alternative to Guangzhou when necessary. Each year, thousands of traders descended on Guangzhou bringing goods from Southeast Asia, India, and lands further west to be stored, sold, and passed into the interior. On its way to the big consumption centres in the north, much of this merchandise would flow through Yangzhou, located at the junction of the Yanzi river and the Grand Canal. At some

⁴⁶ Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 137–40; Soucek, *Inner Asia*, 68.

⁴⁷ Clark, "Frontier Discourse," 26.

undetermined time, foreign traders established permanent communities in Guangzhou and subsequently at Yangzhou and other trade nexus.

If the Song period, which followed the Tang, is usually seen as the great age of Chinese maritime trade,⁴⁸ the foundation for this was laid during the Tang. The issue of land versus water transport, of course, is much broader than Chinese history or global history during the centuries under study. It is at the same time very simple and very complicated. The simple part is that most commercial transactions were local and regional, and thus the transport of goods was done on land or when available by inland waterways. This becomes more complicated when moving goods long distances overland. For commodities with high value relative to their weight, luxuries or precious metals for example, transport costs were less of a factor in determining profit. Correspondingly, with the transportation of bulk items with low value relative to weight—staples like grain, for example—the greater the distance, the less profit to be reaped.⁴⁹ Shipping by sea complicates this correlation further. Although ships of this period were still relatively small, a single ship could carry the equivalent of what was carried on the backs of dozens or perhaps hundreds of pack animals. The greater the distance, the more the advantage to ship by sea, and it was a long way between the Persian Gulf and South China.

Both forms of transport had their trade-offs. A ship represented a huge capital investment, and shipwrecks were common,⁵⁰ but so did pack animals, and many died en route. As for labour costs, what are referred to as “manning ratios,” that is, the ratio of men per ton of merchandise, this generally favoured shipment by sea.⁵¹ So, too, with what are referred to as “protection costs.” Overland this meant customs duties and various other taxes along with various forms of extortion (often the former and latter were indistinguishable) and the hiring of guards. Still, merchants ran the risk of being robbed. Protection costs throughout history were often higher than the actual cost of transportation.⁵² Maritime shippers could expect to be bilked by authorities at both ends of their trip but not in between unless they had the misfortune of encountering pirates. Both overland and by sea, a merchant needed to make a profit coming and going. But considering land and sea routes as competing systems misses an appreciation of how they complemented each other. Sea routes started at ports, which obtained their goods through their connections with land routes, those same routes over which the imported merchandise would flow into the hinterland.⁵³ And many products grown, mined, or manufactured deep inside Eurasia would never make it to the sea.

During the heyday of Tang–ʿAbbāsīd trade, the luxury market boomed and the prospect of making a fortune was the magnet that drew not just Persians but Arabs, soon to be integrated together simply as Muslims, and Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians from

48 Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society*; Gernet, *Daily Life*.

49 Kindleberger, *Foreign Trade*, 11.

50 Clark, *Community, Trade*, 35.

51 Unger, *Ship*, 26–27.

52 Edens and Kohl, “World Systems,” 30.

53 Whitfield, “Was There a Silk Road?”, 207.

southwestern Asia by the thousands. Increasingly, however, in various parts of the maritime trade world there would be more potential for growth in the bulk market in such products as ceramics and in textiles, in which cotton goods would eventually replace silk in importance. A recently discovered shipwreck off the coast of Belitung Island east of Sumatra appears to have gone down ca. 890 during a return journey from China. It held a telling cargo. Among its 60,000 items were some gold and luxury items like a silver flask, gilt-silver boxes, spices, and resins. But the huge majority of items were ceramic bowls produced at kilns in three different locations in southeastern China.⁵⁴ In short, while this cargo contained some valuable items, even a relatively modest size ship had plenty of space for more bulk goods. The Belitung wreck was a common dhow, 50 feet in length and 21 feet in width made by sewing planks of wood together using coconut fibres not unlike the method of shipbuilding described in the anonymous *Periplus* written about seven and a half centuries earlier.⁵⁵ The trade it represented was not a product of technological determinism; it was not made possible by startling new breakthroughs in nautical technology, ship design, or mapping that appeared in this period.⁵⁶ The use of the magnetic compass on board Chinese ships was first recorded in 1119 and certainly did not go back before the tenth century.⁵⁷ Dhow navigators still used the heavens to determine location.

Initially, the Tang had followed the Sui in their nonchalant attitude towards maritime trade.⁵⁸ This changed in the face of one looming reality: Tang governmental expenses always outpaced Tang governmental income, and overseas trade could become an important source of revenue. In the early eighth century, the first reference to the Superintendency of Maritime Trade, an official agency of the imperial government, appeared in Chinese sources.⁵⁹ Ships arriving in Guangzhou had to register their cargo with the superintendency and pay assessed duties. Goods were then stored in a government warehouse until the arrival of the last ship of the season before being sold. The government reserved the rights of first refusal and practised compulsory purchase of what it considered to be “precious” goods for exclusive use of the imperial household, but it paid the highest market prices on the spot.⁶⁰ The remaining goods were then sold on the market. When it was working properly, such a regulated system offered one great advantage: the mechanisms of trade were predictable, and for merchants predictability was a huge plus. But if the Tang period should be seen as the beginning of large-scale organized Chinese maritime commercial contact with the rest of Eurasia, this comes with a proviso. On the sea, Chinese commerce was largely a matter of coastal trade if for no other reason than Chinese ships of the time were little more than modified versions

⁵⁴ Flecker, “Arab or Indian.”

⁵⁵ *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 36: 8–9.

⁵⁶ Unger, *Ship*, 22.

⁵⁷ Digby, “Maritime Trade,” 131.

⁵⁸ Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures*, 239; Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society*, 103–4.

⁵⁹ Wang, “Nanhai Trade,” 100–102.

⁶⁰ Ibn Khuradādhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, 46.

of the boats used on rivers and canals and not seaworthy enough for venturing beyond shallow waters.⁶¹ Long-distance foreign trade in Tang China depended on foreigners. In this, the Tang appear to be carrying on a tradition of being notorious stay-at-homes that Pliny reported on centuries earlier, noting that the Chinese “shun the company of the remainder of mankind, and wait for trade to come to them.”⁶² What the Tang government did do was to open its markets to others who were enticed to come to China by the potential of making substantial profits.

The sea route from the Persian Gulf to Guangzhou started at Basra almost at the tip of Mesopotamia, if not quite on the Gulf itself. From there, ships sailed to Siraf part way down the Gulf on the northern shore, where they took on additional cargo. Then it was to Muscat or Suhar in Oman before venturing out into the Arabian Sea. Some ships turned right and headed south to cruise the East African coast looking to buy ivory, tortoiseshell, slaves, and, farther south, gold. Farther north on the Somali coast myrrh was available. Most ships, however, turned left, heading in the direction of India. Ships could keep close to the coast, that is within eyesight, the traditional method of sailing that went far back into ancient times, or delve into the high seas riding the monsoon winds. While the coastal route may have provided sailors with a sense of security, it was often more dangerous due to the many hazards concealed underwater near the shoreline and the presence of pirates lurking along certain stretches. Eastward along the coast a ship would come to Daibal in the Indus Delta and from there turn out to sea heading for southern India. Other ships would continue along the coast calling at numerous harbours in Gujarat and the Konkan littorals, picking up merchandise when it was cheap and selling it when it was dear, a practice known as tramping. The terminus for ships coming along the coastline as well as those that rode the monsoons from Oman or Daibal was at the southernmost tip of the Malabar Coast at Quilon (Kollam) or Cochin. From there or neighbouring Sri Lanka ships could, again, do the coastline route around the Bay of Bengal, but most that were involved in the China trade went straight across through the Strait of Melaka, then turned left into the South China Sea. In 671, a ship carrying the Buddhist monk Yijing going in the opposite direction from Guangzhou took less than twenty days to reach the port of Palembang in Sumatra.⁶³ The voyage from Oman to Guangzhou is estimated to have taken 120 days, excluding stops.⁶⁴

For the seamen who made these journeys, two main strategies were tried over the next few centuries. In the early days of Indian Ocean trade, before any semblance of a system began to evolve, individual ships ventured as far as they dared, found a buyer and hopefully a profitable return cargo, and travelled home, perhaps engaging in some opportune tramping on the way. Few ranged very far. Perhaps in the early eighth century and certainly by the time of Ibn Khuradādhbeh, a ninth-century ‘Abbāsid official, Persian ships were making the complete voyage from the Persian Gulf to Guangzhou in a

61 Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society*, 104.

62 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 1.20.55.

63 Hansen, *Silk Road*, 164.

64 Ibn Khuradādhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, 4–5.

single voyage albeit for stops along the way for victualling and to deal with weather and other conditions.⁶⁵ This seemed a reasonable strategy. Dealing in prestige goods was often done directionally, that is, moving in a clearly defined line from source to market without distractions. Every time goods changed hands, someone else took a cut; every time goods had to be offloaded, stored, and reloaded added to the costs. This was certainly true when merchants were travelling over limited areas within the same climatic and commercial zones. It was probably in response to this direct sailing strategy that colonies were first established in Guangzhou to greet and represent the arriving merchants.

Direct sailing strategy, however, had not taken into account one peculiarity of the Persian Gulf to South China route: the winds. A ship could not sail from one side to the other on a single monsoon wind, and wind patterns changed from sector to sector depending on the season. At transitional points, ships sometimes were stuck in insecure anchorages or other dangerous conditions waiting for the winds to change before moving on. Such layovers greatly increased costs. At some point, a new strategy evolved. Ships made circuits riding the monsoons to a transitional point, offloading their cargo, then riding the monsoons back to their home base when the winds reversed, eliminating the long layovers. Ships in the next circuit did the same thing within their own wind pattern. Three big circuits representing three different monsoon systems dominated the trade: Persian Gulf to Malabar Coast India; tip of India to the eastern coast of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula; and ports of insular Southeast Asia to Guangzhou. Al-Mas'ūdī, writing in the mid tenth century,⁶⁶ bemoaned the passing of the direct sea route although the Guangzhou market may have simply been closed in his time due to adverse conditions in South China. Nevertheless, such conditions may have helped speed the transition. Al-Idrīsī, writing a century later, was informed (incorrectly) that the circuit strategy had replaced the direct sea-voyage strategy because of the ebb and flow of waters rather than the blowing of monsoon winds.⁶⁷

Merchants brought a much wider variety of commodities into China than they carried out. Animal products, including ivory, rhino horn, pearls, turtle shells, exotic bird feathers, and coral came from a wide range of sources mostly in Southeast Asia and India. Also from India came cotton textiles and perhaps pepper while other spices, medicines, perfumes, incense, dyes, and fragrant woods originated in Southeast Asia or Arabia. Precious and semi-precious stones and pearls came from India while silver objects, copper, and glassware came from as far away as the Mediterranean. China paid for its imports mostly in silk, fine ceramics, and lacquerware. Maritime trade did have its share of hiccups and at times substantial trauma for the Chinese. Much of this was the result of a chronic problem: foreign merchants suffered rampant corruption at the hands of local officials in the form of extortion and outright plundering. On occasion, this reached a snapping point as in 684 when the governor and ten of his officials were assassinated by an outraged merchant.⁶⁸ While the imperial court formally disapproved

⁶⁵ Ibn Khuradādhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, 4–6.

⁶⁶ al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Rabinowitz, *Merchant Adventurers*, 188–89.

⁶⁷ al-Idrīsī, *Kitāb Nuzhat*, 35.

⁶⁸ Wang, "Nanhai Trade," 75–76; Clark, *Community, Trade*, 27.

of this improbity on the part of its agents, so long as the treasury received its customs duties and the imperial household its precious goods, misbehaviour by officials in far-off Guangzhou appears to have been a less than pressing matter.

In the meantime, Central Asia was becoming more integrated into the Islamic world. The initial centre of 'Abbāsīd power had been Khurasan, the frontier region between Persia and Central Asia. Henceforth, the 'Abbāsīds showed a decided shift eastward in the caliphate's centre of gravity. In 762, the dynasty's second caliph, al-Mansur (754–775 CE) moved the capital from Damascus to a site called Baghdad on the west bank of the Tigris River near to where it came closest to its companion, the Euphrates. As both rivers flowed to the Persian Gulf, commercial considerations were foremost on al-Mansur's mind in making this move. According to the geographer al-Muqaddasī, the caliph inquired among local people and was told: "Supplies can get to you by the vessels plying on the Euphrates; the caravans from Egypt and Syria will come across the desert, goods of all different kinds from China will reach you by sea, and from the Romans [Byzantines] and al-Mawsil [Mosul] by the Tigris."⁶⁹ The shift eastward may have been symbolized by the founding of a new capital, but it represented far larger considerations. The Umayyads had achieved a certain level of cohesion through their conquests, but essentially they created a very large Arab kingdom. The 'Abbāsīd caliphate became a pan-Islamic world empire, a true caliphate with niches for all believers. Syria, which the Umayyads never fully developed into the nucleus of an integrated, imperial commercial system, faded in importance. The maritime trade of the Indian Ocean in the other direction grew exponentially with the ports of Basra and Suhar connecting Baghdad to East Africa, India, and China. 'Abbāsīd society was mercantile at its essence: it was the age of Sinbad the Sailor. Many characters in *One Thousand and One Nights* are merchants, and numerous stories describe the world of commerce, commodities, profits, and fabulous wealth. Sinbad was said to have lived in Basra.

The traders were a mobile mix drawn from Arab, Levantine, Persian, and Central Asian populations. Babylonian Jews were at the centre of a large-scale long-distance network, the Radhanite system, which Ibn Khuradādhbeh describes as operating from Spain to China, supplying luxury goods to the ruling classes and urban elites.⁷⁰ The prodigious expansion in numbers and wealth of the upper echelons of society produced a rich consumer market capable of absorbing huge quantities of merchandise. The empire became an immense unrestricted, integrated trade zone with commerce expanding on ever-widening horizons. On the production side, increased specialization and diversification in both agriculture and handicraft industries fostered exchange between regions. The 'Abbāsīds created a more centralized state with a corresponding increase in economic cohesion, security, communications, and transportation. At the centre was Iraq. The *Hudūd al-Ālam*, an anonymous Persian geographical work of the tenth century, calls Iraq "the most prosperous country in Islam. ... It is the haunt of merchants and a place of great riches."⁷¹

⁶⁹ al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 108–9.

⁷⁰ Ibn Khuradādhbeh, in Lopez and Raymond, *Medieval Trade*, 31–33.

⁷¹ *Hudūd al-Ālam*, 137.

Trade Systems

Far more merchandise flowed within the 'Abbāsīd caliphate than in and out of its distant borders, a maxim that applies equally to China as well as India, Europe, West Africa, and virtually every other political entity or region of the world. If the study of trade and commerce of any era should start at the bottom, it almost never does. Perhaps the daily buying and selling, trading and exchanging of millions of common people are considered too humdrum to examine when compared to the high drama involving high stakes and ultimately important people that took place on the silk or any other long-distance trade road. The root of this problem may be the strict line that is sometimes drawn between local and long-distance trade. This may have some validity for the Bronze and Early Iron ages, but it belies the reality of the Early Middle Ages. By that time, the line had become more porous, the distinctions more subtle, the relationships more seamless. Markets existed on a continuum from periodic village affairs to great emporiums, the centres of imports and exports for a whole region, and they were interconnected through collection and distribution networks. The main distinction was one of scale.

At the village level, the primary activity remained the exchange of daily-use items among food producers—farmers, herdsman, and fishermen—and between them and local craftsmen. Village markets could not be self-contained if only because they needed certain items like iron and salt that they were not likely to produce themselves. For the market, local agriculturalists could offer their surpluses, and as the commercial economy seeped into the countryside in appropriate places, they were stimulated to produce such cash crops as sugar, cotton, spices, dried fruits, wine, and honey. Local craftsmen could develop reputations for making in-demand specialty products, for example, ceramics, leather items, wooden products, tools, and the most highly traded of all commodities, textiles. Most of China's silk was made by peasant women. Above village markets were larger, often highly organized town markets featuring a limited selection of luxury goods including copper products and finer textiles. Village and town markets in areas containing local products in demand elsewhere became collection centres for long-distance trade as well as distribution points for imports like salt. The traders who were the sinews holding together the trading network would deal in a variety of commodities, fitting the concept of a "traveling bazaar."⁷² But even local systems were not developed at random and did not function haphazardly. For a series of trading connections to constitute a system there had to be some degree of continuity and order involving specific goods flowing in a designated manner to a specific place or places to be consumed there or transmitted onward.⁷³ The interrelationships between markets can often give the appearance of a hierarchy.⁷⁴

Above local and regional systems but integrated with them were long-distance systems that impacted economically, culturally, politically, and geopolitically on the history of Afro-Eurasia far out of proportion to the quantity of goods that flowed through

⁷² Dickinson, *Aegean Bronze Age*, 238, referencing Braudel.

⁷³ Perlin, "World Economic Integration," 263; Evers, "Traditional Trading," 145.

⁷⁴ Skinner, *Marketing*.

them. Long-distance trade was organized into shapes. It moved spatially through specified channels prescribed by commercial efficiency that can be impacted by political and cultural considerations. These shapes take the form of trade routes that develop as soon as there is something to trade. Large systems integrated smaller systems together in chains of relays across which exchanges took place. In its integrated whole, a large system served a commercial backbone function for funnelling goods (as well as ideas, technologies, religions, and people) across much larger spaces than they would go in a more willy-nilly manner. Crossing the trunk lines of a system were intersecting routes falling into three categories, feeder, branch, and connector, the differences depending on their relationship to the trunk lines. Feeders were designed to serve a specific function of support whereas connectors were separate systems that at some point plugged into another system. Branch routes fell in between feeders and connectors in being dependent for the high end of their traffic on commodities from the trunk line but being capable of existing in their own right. All three brought goods into and out of a system.

On the largest of systems, merchants travelled in circuits of 100 kilometres or perhaps several hundred kilometres in one direction before transferring their goods and returning home. Goods with varying values entered and exited a system at various points along the way, with heavy-weight, large-bulk, low-value products not likely to go very far. For long-distance goods, this was a trade in luxury items, and only the most valuable of goods were likely to enter one side and exit the other. Systems were often named (by modern observers) by the most prominent of their luxury goods: hence, in ancient times, the lapis lazuli route, the amber route, the Siberian gold route, and the incense road. Occasionally they were given geography-based names, the most prominent being the trans-Saharan. The specific ground over which a route passed would naturally change by a matter of metres or kilometres according to conditions over time without impacting on its overall structural integrity. Systems were flexible from the inside, perhaps complicated when looking at them from the outside, but they were not chaos. A caravan headed across badlands, and there were many such places in Asia and Africa, that simply pointed itself in the direction of the other side and took off in the hope of finding food, water, and pasturage for their pack animals would likely blow back as dust. Trade-route systems were not constructed in one fell swoop but rather incrementally, with sections evolving on their own momentum before fusing together. And they developed independently, eventually connecting with each other directly or through branch routes, their feeders pushing into the nooks and crannies of Afro-Eurasia. Components of the great integrated Eurasian system known as the silk roads may reach into the second millennium BCE.⁷⁵ The name was coined by the German geographer and explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877.⁷⁶ It stuck because it has been a convenience for describing what in the best of times was a series of interlocking connections of paths, tracks, trails, passageways, and occasionally actual roads but in other times was little more than directions signalled by landmarks. The silk-roads system ran westward from China across the region of Gansu,

75 Kuzmina, *Prehistory*.

76 Richthofen, *China*, vol. I; Waugh, "Silk Roads."

into and out of the Tarim Basin where the dreadful Taklamakan Desert lay, over the Pamir mountains to the great trading nexus of Samarkand and farther on to the Iranian plateau. If on the eastern side the anchor of the silk roads was China and more specifically the great city of Chang'an, capital under the Han and Tang and various other dynasties in between, the western side was less firmly set. At times it was certain cities, most often ports that connected into maritime systems on the eastern rim of the Mediterranean Sea or its little brother, the Black Sea. At other times it didn't make it that far, and the terminus would have been somewhere in the Persian empire or its successor, the Islamic caliphate. The silk roads had connector routes at both ends and in between. During the later centuries of the first millennium BCE and early centuries of the first millennium CE, the most prominent of these ran south from Central Asia via Afghanistan through the Hindu Kush, then down the Indus Valley or eastward to the Ganges. Large quantities of Chinese and Central Asian goods went this way either to be consumed in India or sent to ports from which they were shipped westward across the Arabian Sea and up the Red Sea to the Mediterranean.

Two New North–South Systems

During the period under study, two important long-distance trade routes developed, one connecting directly into the silk roads, the other much less so. The latter was the trans-Saharan connecting North and West Africa. The direct connection was a new system sometimes referred to as the fur road, which came, flourished, and vanished very quickly. Trade south to north was not new. The incense road had its origins in the late first millennium BCE. Ancient authors mentioned an even earlier system referred to as the amber route, which, in its fully developed form, was actually a series of overland networks between the Baltic and Mediterranean Sea that stretched back into the Bronze Age.⁷⁷

A predecessor of the fur road developed under the Sasanian empire during the sixth and early seventh centuries. Across the Caspian and Black seas or over the Caucasus mountains, Persian products began to enter a new market. Iranian-related peoples living in southern Russia served as intermediaries in trade that reached up the Volga to the Kama river valley on the northwestern slope of the Ural mountains. Among the peoples of the Kama there was a great demand for Sasanian and Byzantine coins and other silver objects, which were used in religious rituals, in return for northern products, presumably furs and perhaps Arctic goods.⁷⁸ These contacts appear to have been interrupted by the fall of the Sasanian empire and subsequent wars between expanding Islam and the Khazarian empire that controlled the northern Caucasus.

The subsequent fur road was developed during the second half of the eighth century and was up and running by the last two decades following trade treaties between the Khazars and the caliphate.⁷⁹ Judging volume for any trade route is always a guessing

⁷⁷ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXVII.10.42–44.

⁷⁸ Sawyer, *Vikings*, 119; Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, 150–55.

⁷⁹ Noonan "Ninth-Century Dirhem," 41–118.

game at best, bolstered by the observations of contemporaries or by what they had heard, which was often anecdotal. With luck, some documents or official records may have survived, and archaeology can help. On this particular route, one of the two most important commodities was silver, mostly in the form of coins, and people sometimes bury coins in hoards that can be used to indicate the amount of traffic. In the ninth century, this appears to have fluctuated rollercoaster-like from decade to decade, hitting one high point in the 860s, then falling off and ultimately dropping sharply before rebounding and hitting its zenith in the mid tenth century.⁸⁰ The fur road, like the amber and similar roads, was not a single passageway but a series of various north–south routes connecting the Baltic Sea with the caliphate. To do this, it used the Russian river system, starting at the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga and moving generally down rivers, chief of which were the Dnieper, Don, and Volga but also including many smaller rivers, lakes, swamps, and streams—whatever would float a boat. When the waterways did not connect, and the great rivers, for example, did not, travellers resorted to portage, so boats had to be light and small enough to be dragged or carried overland. In some places, portage had to be used even on the water to negotiate dangerous passages like rapids. The Dnieper was reported to have had seven deadly rapids, each of which was given a frightening nickname such as the “Gulper” because it gulped down boats.⁸¹

Initially the main routes crossed the Caucasus mountains, but they shifted eastward in the mid ninth century to the Caspian Sea. At the end of that century they shifted again, and the chief destination became Khwarazm south of the Aral Sea on the Amu Darya (Oxus) river. From there an overland caravan route could take goods to Baghdad or silk-road cities east and south. Farther north, the trade arteries shifted accordingly so that by the time Khwarazm became the main point of destination, the Volga had become the main thoroughfare. Ibn *Khuradādhbeh* noted three routes. One, which he does not pay much attention to, ran directly south to the Crimea and the Black Sea, where the Byzantines levied a 10 percent tax. Then the traders got into their boats and sailed somewhere (he is not specific) on the Black Sea, presumably under Byzantine control. A second route, and Ibn *Khuradādhbeh* is much more detailed about this, implying that this was a much more important route, went to the Sarkel fortress on the Don where the Khazars took their own 10 percent tax and then to the Volga. Finally, “they enter [by ship] the Sea of Gurgan [Caspian] and disembark [there] on the shore where they want [i.e. they sail to whichever Islamic port on the Caspian they wish at the time] and sell [there] all that they have.”⁸² Sometimes, however, these merchants continued on, accompanying their merchandise by camel caravan all the way to Baghdad, where, Ibn *Khuradādhbeh* claims, they passed themselves off as Christians to pay still another tax but at a lower rate than would be charged to “pagans.”

The principal movers in this trading system, the people who collected the furs from those who did the hunting and trapping and provided the transport to market are known variously as Rus, Varangians, and Swedish Vikings. Arab sources refer to them as the

80 Noonan, “Fluctuations.”

81 Stern and Dale, *Vikings*, 30.

82 Ibn *Khuradādhbeh*, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, in Pritsak, “Arabic Text,” 257.

saqlabiya, which they applied to various northern peoples who had fair or red hair and ruddy faces; Ibn Khuradādhbeh considered the Rus as a type of *saqlabiya*. The original core of the Rus were Scandinavians from what is today Sweden who founded trading stations on the eastern and southern coasts of the Baltic, chief of which for eastern expansion was Staraja Lodoga (near modern Saint Petersburg) in the mid eighth century. The Rus were traders and warriors, depending on whatever opportunities were available. As they pushed inland, they established other trading stations at places like Novgorod and Kiev. In these places, the Scandinavians met, mixed, and did business with Slavic, Baltic, and Finno-Ugric peoples, and soon the Rus were a very mixed group. The one first-hand description of them comes from Ibn Faḍlān, an Arab diplomat: "I have never seen people with a more developed bodily stature than they. They are as tall as date palms, blond and ruddy, so that they do not need to wear a tunic." Nevertheless, he was not altogether impressed with them: "They are the dirtiest creatures of God. They have no shame in voiding their bowels and bladder, nor do they wash themselves. ... They are like asses who have gone astray."⁸³

Much of the territory through which the Rus passed was politically fragmented, but there were also two states with settled populations, those of the Khazars and the Volga Bulgurs. Ibn Faḍlān had observed the Rus not in their own lands but during a mission he had been sent on by the caliph to the Volga Bulgurs in 921 CE. They lived due north of the Caspian Sea on the Middle and Upper Volga (modern Tataristan). While he was there, he was told by the Bulghur ruler that three months' journey to the north was the country of Wisu, which the Bulgurs traded with for furs. Beyond that, another three months' journey, lived a people who were giant in size, went about naked, and lived off fish. This could be a hint of trade connections reaching perhaps all the way to the shores of the White Sea.⁸⁴

West and south of the Volga Bulgurs was Khazaria, stretching across the north Caucasian steppes to the lower Volga. The Khazars may have been the first to supply furs and other northern products to the caliphate, which then stimulated the Rus to move into the trade from the north.⁸⁵ Their capital city of Itil, which was at the mouth of the Volga, intersected east-to-west trade routes. Itil was a city of tents but with many bazaars. It was divided into two parts by the river, with one side for the king and his people and the other side for the business sector where the traders lived. This situation was not unique to the Khazars. Thousands of miles to the south and west deep inside West Africa, the geographer al-Bakri reports that the same two-cities-in-one arrangement existed in the capital of the kingdom of Ghana at a slightly later date.⁸⁶ Despite whatever trade went on, the Khazars were traditionally enemies of the caliphate and allies of the Byzantines. Sometime around the beginning of the eighth century, the Khazar royal family and part of the governing class converted to Judaism, but all merchants were welcomed at Itil,

⁸³ Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, 63–64.

⁸⁴ Canard, "Relation du Voyage," 107–9.

⁸⁵ Spufford, *Money*, 67.

⁸⁶ Al-Bakri, in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 79–80.

and the historian Yaqūt estimated that 10,000 Muslims lived there.⁸⁷ With the establishment of the Rus-dominated system, the Khazars and Bulgurs seemed content to serve as middlemen for the trade. For a fee, Rus merchants could pass through or exchange their goods with Muslim merchants, who then took them south.

Furs were not the only commodity that passed through the lands of the Khazars and Bulgurs.⁸⁸ The northern forests produced much honey, an important item of trade in a world where there were few sweeteners, and there was a significant local trade for sheep with Turkic tribesmen. Ibn Khuradādhbeh mentions swords “from the farthest reaches of Saqlabiyah,” which is something of an understatement since they appear to have been manufactured in two places in Germany. Large quantities of these very fine weapons were exported to Scandinavia and then re-exported eastward into the Rus system, ending their circuitous journey in the caliphate.⁸⁹ As for slaves, the Rus themselves appear to have been well supplied with women (“girls”). Their leader (“king”) had forty, and each of his 400 men had two each, one who waited on him and the other for sexual purposes. When a high chief died, a female slave was sacrificed.⁹⁰ The Khazars had their share of slaves as well. Yaqūt reported that “they are white, handsome and beautiful in appearance,” but “they are the people of idols who permit enslaving and selling their children to others.”⁹¹ Ibn Faḍlān describes how a merchant would come to the place where the Rus and their female slaves were staying and make his purchase on the spot even if a Rus was having sexual intercourse with the slave the merchant wanted to buy. The accepted procedure in this trade seems to have been for the Rus to bring their slaves to the Khazar and Bulghur markets and sell them to Muslims, in particular Khwarazmian merchants, who then took them south to the caliphate or Central Asia. It should be noted that the Rus were not the only suppliers for this market. Turkic tribes warring against each other provided a steady supply of victims, and not all of the victims were females. Male slaves, destined for use in ‘Abbāsīd armies, were also involved.

Slaves, swords, and honey were important secondary commodities, but the fur road was powered, obviously, by the trade in furs. Here was a valuable product that could be easily carried from a source that for a time seemed inexhaustible with a wealthy customer base that provided a considerable demand. The fur-bearing creatures that were the prey were harvested in a wide swath of forestland that stretched across northern Sweden and Finland and into Karelia, an especially productive region, then eastward to the Ural Mountains. Furs were obtained mostly through well-organized hunting systems, often by people who were specialized hunters,⁹² although doubtless Rus traders were not above extorting tribute in the form of furs from tribes they were able to intimidate. Certain tribes paid tribute to the Khazars in the form of squirrel skins collected from

87 Yaqūt, in Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, 73.

88 Lewicki, “Commerce des Samanides.”

89 Ibn Khuradādhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, in Pritsak, “Arabic Text,” 250–51, 256.

90 Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, 67–71.

91 Yaqūt, in Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla*, 74–75.

92 Wigh, “Animal Bones,” 88.

each family.⁹³ Animals could be processed on the spot, with the meat never consumed, or sent on to processing centres like Birka in east central Sweden, where thousands of skins arrived every year. Itil was known for its tailors, their specialty being coats. The furs of large animals like bears were much in demand, and Ibn *Khuradādhbih* singles out beavers and black foxes,⁹⁴ but the most exhaustive list comes from al-Muqaddasī's catalogue of products from various places. Under Khwarazm, he puts first: "sable; squirrel; white weasel; fennec and its fur; fox; beaver; hare pelts variously coloured," then adds a few non-fur products ranging from fish glue to hazelnuts, before informing his reader that all of this actually originated with the Bulghurs.⁹⁵

If the Rus did not create this market, they quickly moved in to exploit it when it opened and took off. The wearing of furs had not been very popular in the Roman empire, a trend that continued into the Early Middle Ages among Mediterranean basin peoples. But with the advent of the 'Abbāsids, and the political and cultural shift eastward to the borderlands of Central Asia, the wearing of fur became more common. Dignitaries began appearing in court decked out in fur garments. In this highly cosmopolitan and very rich society where there was a heightened demand for all luxury goods, the wearing of fur garments became a fashion statement and soon a status symbol.⁹⁶ Hats made of "sammur" (marten or sable) were used in gift exchange among those in power, including the caliphs. When the most famous of caliphs, Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE) died, 4,000 robes and 4,000 pairs of shoes lined with sammur were found in his wardrobe.⁹⁷

The caliphate paid for its furs by sending north products in transit from farther east like silk and those manufactured goods from its own workshops like glazed pottery and glassware. Nevertheless, the companion commodity to fur was silver, usually in the form of dirhams. In most periods of history, as, for example, during the Roman empire, the commodities of Asia were in greater demand in Europe than the products of Europe were in demand in Asia. The difference was made up by paying with bullion.⁹⁸ Over the centuries, well into the second millennium CE, literally tons of silver and gold flowed eastward with one notable if short-lived exception: during the heyday of the fur road when silver flowed into parts of Europe from parts of Asia. During this particular time, silver was scarce in northern Europe. In Central Asia it was not. Two mines were extraordinarily productive, one at Shash (Tashkent in modern Uzbekistan), which may have been operational at the end of the eighth century, producing what one estimate puts as high as 30 tons annually,⁹⁹ and what has been called the "fabulous" mines of Pendjhir (in Afghanistan), which began production in the second half of the ninth century.¹⁰⁰ Some

93 Barford, *Early Slavs*, 164.

94 Ibn *Khuradādhbeh*, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, in Pritsak, "Arabic Text," 256.

95 al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 286.

96 Howard-Johnston, "Trading in Fur," 72–75.

97 Gil, "Radhanite Merchants," 312–13.

98 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XII.41.84.

99 Bolin, "Ruric," 21.

100 Sawyer, *Vikings*, 109.

indication of this output can be seen by the amount of silver reaching the other end of the fur road, where more than 200,000 coins from 1,400 finds have been recovered.¹⁰¹ Coins could be used as currency and accepted in markets as such. But the real importance of the dirham was that it was a source of silver and, as such, served as a medium of exchange measured by weight and silver content as were other sources of silver such as bars, jewellery, and ornaments. For smaller payments, hacksilver was used by breaking dirhams into fragments, usually halves or quarters, sometimes cut finely, at other times broken rather crudely.

It has been estimated that only slightly less than half of the dirhams exported northward from the caliphate and Central Asia made it to the Baltic.¹⁰² In the early years of the trade, few dirhams in the eastern Baltic were re-exported. In the late ninth century, when the transit market at Birka was booming, as was the Danish entrepôt of Hedeby, more dirhams were flowing westward eventually to the British Isles and even Iceland. How much of this silver ultimately ended up south of Scandinavia in continental western Europe, specifically the Carolingian empire, has been a point of debate among historians. In one scenario, not much, at least there is very little physical evidence. The Carolingians were strongly anti-Islamic and were not about to countenance coins with Islamic symbols and legends circulating in their empire. In an opposing scenario, the Carolingians obtained large quantities through trade with Scandinavia in exchange for manufactured goods like pottery, glassware, stone querns, and wine. They used this to reform their own currency and help commercialize their economy.¹⁰³ In completely different directions, 'Abbāsīd silver was being moved southward to India and eastward to China.¹⁰⁴

The trade in silver declined in the second half of the tenth century. Between 1010 and 1015, it disappeared.¹⁰⁵ Archaeology in the form of coin hoards bears witness to this but without explaining why. Taken together, a combination of factors is the likely culprit. The most important was that the mines became worked out and ceased production. In a short time, the Islamic monetary system itself began experiencing disruption due to a lack of silver; silver exports were quickly replaced by silver imports. In the mid tenth century, new mines opened in central Europe, and soon silver was flowing back into Scandinavia but this time from Germany and England, the latter in the form of tribute. Political upheavals across lands that were crucial to the smooth workings of the fur road added to the commercial dislocation. In 963, the Khazar empire was destroyed by an alliance of the Oghuz, a nomadic Turkish people, and the Rus, who were creating their own state. Twenty years later the same successful alliance defeated the Volga Bulgurs. Farther south, the 'Abbāsīd caliphate as a political entity was slowly dissolving, but for the tenth century Transoxania and Khurasan were governed by the Samanids, who

101 Barford, *Early Slavs*, 175; Spufford, *Money*, 67.

102 Noonan, "Fluctuations," 239.

103 Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*, 169–72; Verhulst, *Carolingian Economy*, 3–4.

104 Cribb, "Historical Survey," 192–93.

105 Noonan, "Fluctuations," 243–44, 250–52.

maintained the ‘Abbāsīd system. In 999, the Samanid state crumbled, and the western reaches of Central Asia became open to a mass infiltration of Turkish tribal peoples. This does not have to mean that trade across eastern Europe from the Islamic lands automatically disintegrated because no more dirhams were flowing to the Baltic. Other less easily detected products may have moved into the void although they could not have been as valuable.¹⁰⁶

In the big picture of long-distance trade across the millennia, the fur road may seem a flash in the pan. In the limited period under study, however, it was important because it constituted the main commercial contact between two parts of the world, Europe and southwest Asia, that had a long history of interaction but for reasons not economic chose not to do business with each other, at least not officially. That the fur road had been so successful, albeit for only a short time, was notable for another reason. At a time when seaborne trade was gaining advantage over long-distance land trade, it was able to hold its own by combining land and river.

Land and river also played a major role in the other system of note that was taking shape in this period. West of Egypt was the Maghrib, which the *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam* proclaimed to be a land of gold.¹⁰⁷ Actually, the gold originated on the other side of the Sahara in the river valleys of West Africa. Arab geographers had been aware of this since at least the late eighth century when the land the Arabs called Ghana was first noticed by a geographer-astronomer named al-Fazari. His work is now lost, but one sentence from it was quoted later by al-Mas‘ūdī: “The province of Ghana, the land of gold, is 1,000 by 80 farsukhs” (a Persian measurement).¹⁰⁸

Trade into and out of the Sahara existed from an ancient time as did trade within the Sahara in the form of trickle trade or casual relays between oases and nomadic tribes. Goods were passed along using the relay system until someone consumed them. A few items made it from one side to the other in a willy-nilly process that must have taken a long time.¹⁰⁹ The most enigmatic example yet found is a dark-blue glass bead uncovered in the city of Djenné Jenou on the western bend of the Niger 250 miles south of Timbuktu. Dating between 250 BCE and 50 CE, it is a rare type produced in Asia, particularly China during the Han dynasty with a western range extending only to southern India. Another yellowish bead probably came from India. Together, these two little pieces of glass give some hint of an Asian tie, but the particulars of such a connection remain a complete enigma with many possible scenarios, all of which are highly unlikely.¹¹⁰

Exactly when trade across the Sahara transitioned from an unstructured process into an orderly system is a point of debate, with one school of opinion seeing this as occurring in fairly quick order in the eighth century while another seeing a much slower process, stretching far back into the first millennium BCE.¹¹¹ The vast majority

106 Noonan, “Russia’s Eastern Trade.”

107 *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, 153.

108 al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 32.

109 McIntosh (Susan), “Early Ghana,” 361, 365.

110 Brill, “Chemical Analysis,” 252–55.

111 Liverani, “Libyan Caravan”; Brooks, “Climate and History,” 147.

of goods that flowed into, out of, and across the Sahara are now undetectable, meaning archaeologically invisible. Herodotus, without discussing trade, provides a description of settlements located along a stretch of ten-day intervals, reaching deep into the desert.¹¹² Among the people he mentions were the Garamantes, who lived in the Fezzan oasis region (southern Libya). From archaeological evidence and Roman sources, it is clear that the Garamantes traded with the Carthaginians and later the Romans, their most famous product being a somewhat mysterious gem called the carbuncle, for which, in return, they received various items including olive oil and metal products. No doubt the Garamantes also traded with other Saharans and probably with the peoples of the savannah to their south.¹¹³

The Garamantes hung on through the fall of Rome only to fade in the following centuries. Some Roman exports, including glass and fine red-ware ceramics, continued to travel south in the fourth century, and other Mediterranean products have been recovered among Saharan grave goods from the fifth and sixth centuries. Roman coins circulated in Saharan commercial centres, and a Roman bead of the type made in Italy and Egypt is among the artefacts found in Djenné Jenô.¹¹⁴ In any case, the demand for carbuncles was not going to power a trans-Saharan system. For that to happen, a product for which there was a pre-existing demand would have to be identified and developed along with an efficient means of transport. Around the beginning of the fourth century, the mint at Carthage began striking a noticeable quantity of gold coins, indicating that abundant supplies were available. Largely through a process of elimination West Africa has been suggested as the source, although sceptics see little hard evidence for this.¹¹⁵ The use of gold jumped again in the sixth and seventh centuries when much of North Africa was under the Byzantine empire. Again, West Africa has been proposed as the source of this gold, but again there is no hard evidence, and a reasonable alternative has been suggested.¹¹⁶ Nor is there any other evidence to show that a full-blown trans-Saharan trading system had developed. It is more likely that the dribbles were becoming larger and more frequent, and parts of the connection process were becoming more formalized. But the passing-along system would be replaced only when merchants could start at one side of the desert and traverse to the other side or go to a point where they could exchange with other merchants who would complete the trip.

The original players in the trans-Saharan trade were Berbers from the oases of the northern desert and their partners in the south, an enterprising merchant class from the West African ethnic group known as the Soninke. They were soon joined by a new group, the Kharijites (Seceders), Islamic sectarians who were persecuted in the Islamic homeland by Sunni and Shia alike. Trade systems are often developed by specialized or minority groups, and two branches of Kharijitism, the Ibadis and the Sufrites, found

112 Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV.168–94.

113 Strabo, *Geographica*, XVII.3.19; Mattingly, *Archaeology of Fazzan*; Milburn, “Romans and Garamantes.”

114 Brett and Fentress, *Berbers*, 208; Briggs, *Tribes*, 41; Brill, “Chemical Analysis,” 255.

115 Garrard, “Myth and Metrology”; Kaegi, “Byzantium.”

116 Sutton, “West African Metals.”

fertile ground in North Africa where caliphal armies had badly mistreated the local Berber population. The Sufrites ended up in Morocco, where they withdrew into the oases of the northern Sahara to protect themselves from attacks from the sea. There they came to dominate the western trans-Saharan trade route from their city of Sijilmasa.¹¹⁷ Sufrites were probably the first Muslim merchants to trade on a regular basis with Ghana.

The largest and most important of the Kharijite sects in North Africa was the Ibadis. These were often from merchant families in Iraq who provided capital and commercial expertise. The Ibadis were by nature thrifty, hard-working, and clannish, an ideal mercantile community. They founded the city of Tahert (eastern Algeria), where they set up their own kingdom. Their business acumen and their bond with Berber tribes of the interior, who had knowledge of the routes, controlled the territory, and provided the guides, allowed the Ibadis to control the eastern and central trans-Saharan components. Before the coming of the Ibadis, a few routes ran across the Sahara, but the Ibadis wove these together and greatly expanded them into a web of sand highways east to west as well as north to south connecting the major oases with the two sides of the desert. They traded in anything they could make a profit from including gold, but much of their prosperity came from expanding the trade in a second commodity: slaves brought up from south of the Sahara. Beginning in the eighth century, the trans-Saharan slave trade became virtually an Ibadi monopoly.¹¹⁸

The efficient means of transport came with the adoption of the camel, which, for reasons not readily apparent, took an inordinately long time to become fully integrated into Saharan commerce given its usefulness on the incense road much earlier in nearby Arabia.¹¹⁹ For the trans-Saharan route system that connected North Africa via the Sahara to the savannah region that became known as the western Sudan, two principles prevailed: how short and safe a road was and how much profit could be made by carrying particular goods from one point to another. The interaction of these principles determined who went where, when, and why.

To the north, the trans-Saharan connected into east-west routes that ran across North Africa between Cordoba and Cairo. The trans-Saharan itself was not a single road. At any particular time, there were two, three, four, or five major routes running roughly parallel to each other, starting near the Atlantic and moving longitudinally eastward to the Nile Valley.¹²⁰ Routes faded in and out according to conditions, which is why there is some question as to how many of them are recognized at a given time. They were connected to routes running laterally so goods could be shipped south, north, east, or west. Such roads also served as feeders to mines or other commodity sources that were worth the detour. The main trunk lines usually ran from water source to water source provided this did not make the journey too circuitous since the main objective once one entered the Sahara was to get to the other side as quickly as possible.

117 Miller, "Trading through Islam."

118 Thirty, *Sahara Libyen*, 132–65, 194.

119 Shaw, "Camel"; Bulliet, *Camel and the Wheel*, 29, 116–18.

120 Hunwick et al., "Géographie du Soudan"; Devisse, "Question d'Aoudaghost," 383, 396, 400–402.

Caravans started at staging posts on the northern edge of the desert like Sijlmasa or Ghadames (Libya). To the west, two sets of trails brought caravans carrying copper, wool, beads, and probably some foodstuffs like figs and dates southwesterly, one slanting hard to Takrur (Senegal), the other veering more gently to Awdaghust (Mauritania). Al-Ya'qūbī, who first mentions the Sijlmasa-to-Awdaghust route, put it at "a distance of 50 stages."¹²¹ Along the way, at oasis refreshment stations, water and food could be obtained and guides and camels exchanged. Some caravans went back and forth from staging posts to refreshment stations, swapping their goods with caravans making similar loops from the south. Caravans destined to make the whole trip would rest, then continue on.

To the east, the road to Egypt, sometimes called the diagonal route, connected the Niger and the Nile. According to seventeenth-century Timbuktu historian Abd al-Rahman as-Sadi: "This city [Kukiya on the eastern bend of the Niger] existed already at the time of the Pharaoh and it is from it that came the troupe of magicians who were used during the dispute that he had with Moses."¹²² As-Sadi's enthusiasm was grounded in local tradition rather than historical accuracy but remained a point of speculation long thereafter.¹²³ Ibn al-Faqīh, who wrote at the turn of the tenth century, describes the diagonal route's itinerary:

They say that when you cross the land of Ghana, travelling towards the land of Misr [Egypt], you reach a nation of the Sudan called Kawkaw [Gao in Mali], then another nation, called Maranda [near Air] and then yet another, called Marawa [perhaps in Wadi-Darfur] and then Wahat Misr, the Oasis of Egypt at Malsana.¹²⁴

This route, according to Ibn Hawqal, was ordered closed by the Egyptian ruler Ibn Tulun (868–884) after sandstorms buried some caravans.¹²⁵ It was never reopened.

Having reached a desert-edge Sahelian city, the most important before the founding of Timbuktu in the early twelfth century being Awdaghust and Tadmekka (Mali), most merchants were content to do their business, rest up, and turn around, although there were colonies of North African merchants pocketed farther south. Both Awdaghust and Tadmekka were located north of the Niger bend. The straightest path between North Africa and the Niger bend crosses through some of the worst parts of the Sahara including the Tanezrouft, "the Region of Thirst," so trade routes were developed around the desert's centre. Gold from Ghana to Ifriqiya or Tripolitania (Libya) was sent east through the Songhay Kingdom of Gao on the eastern Niger bend, then north up the Tilemsi Valley to Tadmekka. It became a centre for slaves, gold, and copper although the most lucrative trade may have been in salt coming from the mines of the Sahara to Gao, from where it was exported southward.

¹²¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 22.

¹²² Al-Sadi, *Tarikh al-Sudan*, 6–7.

¹²³ Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, IV.412, 426–27; Dubois, *Timbuctoo*, 95–97.

¹²⁴ Ibn al-Faqīh, in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 27.

¹²⁵ Ibn Hawqal, in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 45.

Situated closer to Ghana, Awdaghust may have enjoyed an even more thriving economy than Tadmekka.¹²⁶ The good life in Awdaghust was very good according to al-Bakri:

The people of Awdaghust enjoy extensive benefits and huge wealth. The market there is at all times full of people, so that owing to the great crowd and the noise of voices it is almost impossible for a man to hear the words of one sitting beside him. Their transactions are in gold.¹²⁷

The gold of Awdaghust came from Ghana. By the ninth century, gold from Ghana was being struck into dinars on the other side of the Sahara in Ifriqiya.¹²⁸ Arab geographers began the practice of referring to the great gold-bearing area of West Africa as “Ghana,” and subsequent writers used the term interchangeably to designate the country, its capital city, and the title of its ruler. The Ghanaian ruler did not exercise direct control over the gold mines, which were far to the south in a region called Bambuk in the upper Senegal region and eventually Bure on the upper Niger.¹²⁹ He ran a middleman operation. His agents and brokers took the goods from the trans-Saharan merchants to the miners, exchanged them, and returned with gold. Ghana provided security and support on the southern end of the trans-Saharan and in return taxed the trade coming and going. The resulting revenues provided the resources and materials like iron weapons, which allowed Ghana to dominate.¹³⁰

Ghana was the best known of the sub-Saharan polities of the first millennium and the richest, largest, and most powerful. But it was not the only one. Ghana lay to the northwest of the Niger bend; straddling the northeastern part of the bend itself was the Songhay kingdom of Gao, which Arab authors referred to as “Kawkaw.”¹³¹ The region marked the northern edge of the rain-fed agricultural zone and was a natural crossroads for trade. Foodstuffs like grain could come up the bend to Gao, and along with dried fish and hippo meat be sent on to the marketplace in Tadmekka: Gao became Tadmekka’s grocer. Artisan and craftsman classes developed, and the city became known for its blacksmiths and weavers. Ibadi merchants arrived looking for slaves. South of Gao, state-building was taking place, which led to wars, and warfare in the ancient world generated slaves. The Ibadis were also looking for gold, and some gold may have been mined in the Sirba Valley (Burkina Faso) downriver from Gao, although Gao also had easy access to gold from Ghana. A third major product developed for export in the Songhay kingdom was ivory, both from elephant herds to the south and from the hippos that were, at this time, plentiful on this section of the river.¹³² Trade between Tahert and Gao started within a few years after the Ibadi city was founded.

126 Devisse, “Question d’Aoudaghust,”

127 Al-Bakri, in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, 68.

128 Jonson et al., “Byzantine Mint”; Gondonneau et al., “Frappe de l’Or.”

129 Cahen, “L’Or du Soudan.”

130 Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana*, 16–29, 115–70; McIntosh, “Early Ghana,” 367–69.

131 Cissé, “Trans-Saharan Trade,” 101–30.

132 Insoll, “Cache of Hippopotamus.”

From Ghana and Gao, merchandise flowed south into various regional systems that were especially well developed in the inland Niger delta region, where large-scale trade went back to the ancient trading cities of Dia (Ja) and Djenné Jenou in the late first millennium BCE.¹³³ The main problem for long-distance trade in West Africa was the high cost of haulage. Transportation costs doubled or tripled coming across the Sahara, and items carried on through the savannah to the forest region became much more expensive. Part of the problem was that the wheel was not used to haul merchandise in either the Sahara or in West Africa. In the Sahara, this deficiency was made up by the camel, the world's consummate pack animal. But moist climes meant diseases for camels, so most of the time they stopped in the Sahelian cities, where goods were transferred to donkeys or oxen. Their use stopped at the tsetse-fly line, beyond which the dreaded trypanosomiasis put hooved animals to sleep permanently. Where rivers existed, goods were offloaded onto boats; where they didn't, goods were put on the heads of humans. Head portage was the most expensive method of transporting goods; not only did humans carry less, they also had to be fed while animals grazed along the way. The most stable commercial arteries in West Africa were provided by the rivers, particularly the Niger, which offered on its middle section over 1,000 miles of navigable waterways.¹³⁴ River travel was an efficient and cheap way of moving goods, particularly foodstuffs and other bulky cargoes, over long distances, but the river was not the sea: it had a determined course that strictly limited its commercial horizon.

The goods that came into the staging posts on the northern edge of the Sahara for shipment southward were more varied than the goods that came northward from the Sahelian cities. Staging posts were doorways into the huge trading system that stretched across North Africa into Eurasia. Each nook and cranny provided its specialty to be passed on to other nooks and crannies. West Africa could buy goods that originated from all over Afro-Eurasia, but it could pay only with its specialties. The most special of West Africa's specialties was gold. It was exchanged for a variety of products, but salt was by far the most important. To the people of West Africa, the need for salt can scarcely be exaggerated since both the savannah and the forest below it were hot lands where perspiration leached the body, and no major deposits of rock salt existed. Unlike gold and other principal commodities, salt did not enter the system on one end and exit on the other but rather entered along the way at mines in the northern Sahara. By the time it reached the Sahelian cities, the price of salt normally increased fivefold, a large part of which was absorbed by depreciation of the camels.¹³⁵ More archaeologically visible imports included manufactured goods, particularly glass products, beads, glazed pottery, jewellery, and bronze metalwork. Much of the finished goods came from Ifriqiya, but some originated in al-Andalus or Egypt. Copper often in the form of bars or rods was the most important metal, some of it coming from mines in the Sahara. Of the

133 McIntosh, *Middle Niger*, 167–201, 213–16; Insoll, “Cache of Hippopotamus,” 331; Bedaux, *Recherches archéologiques*.

134 Smith, “Canoe in West African History”; Tymowski, “Niger.”

135 Devisse, “Question d’Aoudaghost.”

archaeologically undetectable items, textiles along with various foodstuffs comprised the bulk of commodities.¹³⁶

The trans-Saharan system, albeit with many changes, extended into the second millennium at a time Eurasian overland routes were fading (with one great comeback under the Mongol empire). It was successful because it penetrated into an area that was largely inaccessible to sea transport, and its gold remained in demand until the opening of the Americas. In the end, the trans-Saharan survived not as a needed outlet for West African gold but as a way of paying for Saharan salt. Even in the worst of times, the demand for salt remained steady, and somehow West Africans found the means to pay for it.

The Golden Age

If the caliphate had the fur road to the north and the maritime Indian Ocean crossing to the south and the silk roads to the east, it enjoyed no corresponding system to the west. The shore of the Mediterranean, 400 miles west of Iraq, was connected by a caravan track across the dismal Syrian Desert. In the ninth century, Syria regained some prominence due to its position as intermediary between the Mediterranean and the 'Abbāsīd heartland. The Egyptian economy had been one of the most productive in the world, but Egypt had emerged from its Byzantine period exploited and tired; it would rise again under the Fatimids but for the time being did not qualify as a world-class centre of commerce. To the west of Egypt at select spots across North Africa, the trans-Saharan routes were starting to take shape, and the gold they would bring would eventually trickle through the economies of Afro-Eurasia, bringing benefits, directly or indirectly, to trade and commerce from Europe to India. For the caliphate, however, the staging posts of the northern Sahara were too far away and too remote to plug straight into and thereby exercise much direct control over.

Muslim territory did not end on the Atlantic shores of North Africa but turned northward to include most of Spain. The 'Abbāsīds never controlled this far outpost of Islam, which was the only part of the old caliphate that remained under a branch of the Umayyads. They established a strong centralized state with an economy far more productive than its Christian neighbours to the north and an elite class that proved eager to partake in the large-scale consumption of luxury goods. Sinbad, however, sailed the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, not the Mediterranean. If the Arabs were more anxious to trade with Asia than with Europe, it was because Asia had more desirable products to sell and had more wealth with which to buy the products of the caliphate. As with the Umayyads earlier, 'Abbāsīd trade with western Europe and the Byzantine empire was never completely cut off. The elite classes of western Europe still desired luxury products from the East when they could muster payment in the form of such commodities as slaves, furs, and finely made swords.¹³⁷ Much of the time such trade was marginal or indirect through third parties due to seemingly endless wars. In the mid ninth century,

136 Mattingly and Cole, "Commodities of Trade," 211–30.

137 Attman, "Flow of Precious Metals," 8.

hostilities began to abate if only because important elements in the ‘Abbāsīd governing class came to the conclusion that the Byzantine empire was not going to crumble and that war without end was not the best way to address the issue of an always empty treasury.

The *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam* notes that Iraq was “situated near the centre of the world.”¹³⁸ For people living in the caliphate it was a reasonable statement as far as the world of commerce went. Iraq was certainly at the crossroads of the Afro-Eurasian world system, the land bridge for long-distance trade coming across the western extension of the silk roads where the Caspian and Black seas on one side and the Persian Gulf on the other funnelled traffic towards the Mediterranean. Increasingly, it was also the maritime portal of the Western world. During what has been referred to as the *Pax Islamica*, the period of ‘Abbāsīd hegemony in the late eighth and ninth centuries, Baghdad was the central mechanism of an engine that provided the impetus for widespread connectivity across an expanding Islamic world, the edges of which reached out to remote corners of the wider world. The coasts of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans were linked as never before, even if very few goods made such a trip and even fewer, if any, people. The removal of many barriers to trade and the prevalence of open markets have led some scholars to proclaim this as “the Golden Age of Islamic Commercial Capitalism.”¹³⁹ The currents of commerce rippled outward beyond the borders of the caliphate, helping to drive neighbouring economies in East and South Asia and impacting on even more peripheral areas in Europe, Africa, and the far north.

The roads over which these currents rippled, however, were shifting farther. The Tang–caliphate standoff diffused after Talas, but warfare did not go away. As Tibet elbowed its way into the China-to-India routes and finally into the Tarim Basin, the region continued to be destabilized. Travelling overland with a load of tempting merchandise could be risky business. This warfare, ironically, may have reflected increasing concerns over receding trade prospects and shrinking markets. Nevertheless, with a consumer market like the ‘Abbāsīd heartland driving demand, what was lost on land would be gained elsewhere. As overland traffic became increasingly problematic, maritime traffic from the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea evolved into a more stable network than ever before. Crucial to this process was the rise of Srivijaya. Sometimes described as an empire, other times a federation, Srivijaya was made up of a string of ports centring on the city of Palembang in southeastern Sumatra. Between 670 and 1025, Srivijaya controlled the passageways through peninsular and insular Southeast Asia separating the Indian and Pacific Ocean basins. Palembang’s fleets protected maritime commerce, for a fee, of course, and its cities provided storage facilities and accommodations. Local substitute products like camphor and benzoin, both resins from the forests of Sumatra used as incense and for medicinal purposes, began to enter the export market to China as did a particular type of pepper produced in Sumatra and Java used mostly to treat ailments. More expensive spices, especially cloves, nutmeg, and mace from islands 2,000 miles to

138 *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, 137.

139 Labib, “Capitalism,” 79–96; Ashtor, *Social and Economic*, 112–13.

the east, were being integrated into the trade as well.¹⁴⁰ On founding Baghdad, Caliph al-Mansur is said to have exclaimed: "This is the Tigris; here is no distance between us and China. Everything on the sea can come to us."¹⁴¹

The Decline of Tang–ʿAbbāsīd Trade

The two engines that drove much of the long-distance trade systems across Eurasia in the centuries between 600 and 900 came and went together. Eventually the golden ages of the ʿAbbāsīds and the Tang began to lose their lustre. For the Tang, there was one event it was never able to overcome; for the ʿAbbāsīds, there was one problem it was never able to solve. These were essentially matters concerning political power rather than deep-seated economic issues; nevertheless, when political systems become dysfunctional, they drag their economic systems into the abyss they create.

China headed downhill before its counterpart in the west. The Battle of Talas proved more a symptom than a cause of China's problems. Five years after the ʿAbbāsīds overthrew the Umayyads in 750, the An Lushan rebellion began in China. The huge armies needed to protect China's northern frontiers were increasingly made up of mercenaries organized into military governorships that evolved into quasi-independent warlordships. The most powerful of these was under An Lushan, the son of a Sogdian father and Turkish mother. The Sogdians had reconnected the silk-roads system, and under them trade increased from the sixth into the eighth centuries. Early in his life An Lushan had worked as a horse trader but joined the Tang army and rose through its ranks until he commanded a large force. In the meantime, he is suspected of having laid the groundwork for rebellion by creating an extensive smuggling and black-market network among Sogdian merchants.¹⁴² The rebellion began on December 16, 755, with the rebels quickly overrunning much of northern China including Loyang and Chang'an. In January 757, An Lushan was murdered by his son, but the rebellion continued under another general.

As for South China, although the armies of An Lushan never set their sights on Guangzhou, at the other end of Guangzhou's trade corridor the capital city of Loyang was devastated, and the trade of the canal cities and the Yanzi Valley disrupted. Local officials took advantage of the central government's preoccupation with the rebellion to prey on foreign merchants. This became so egregious that in 758 the Persian and Arab merchant communities rose up and plundered warehouses, ransacked the city, collected whatever loot they could, and sailed away. Guangzhou went into eclipse for a half century, during which those foreigners who still wanted to do business with China switched their operations to Jiaozhi or farther south to Srivijaya. The An Lushan rebellion fell more directly on the key commercial hub of Yangzhou. A Tang army sent to restore order in the Yanzi delta instead sacked Yangzhou, and three years later in 763 the same fate fell on Guangzhou. The An Lushan rebellion ended that same year.

140 Hall, *Maritime Trade*, 78–80; Smith, "All-Water Route," 24–25.

141 Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, 64.

142 Yao, *Ngan Lou-chan*, 108–9.

China emerged from the An Lushan rebellion badly weakened. In the Tarim Basin, most of the troops loyal to the Tang had been withdrawn to fight the rebels, allowing the Tibetans to capture the garrisons guarding the caravan routes in the southern Tarim basin. Tibetan expansion into the Tarim was designed to gain control over the trade routes, a simple enough policy except that it was predicated on a conceptual flaw. The silk-roads system operated because customers on the western end wanted products from the eastern end, and the major product that still held the highest value-to-weight ratio was silk.¹⁴³ When the Tang withdrew their armies during the An Lushan rebellion, the big silk payouts to troops dried up, and no doubt this had a negative impact on this particular commodity. Also, other places were producing silk. By the end of the ninth century, Islamic production was so abundant Muslim merchants were exporting it to the Byzantine empire.¹⁴⁴ Tibet, on the other hand, produced no silk nor any other product comparable in international demand. It did produce some gold, but the export most in demand was musk, a valuable commodity but not one that could fuel the trans-Eurasian commercial system.¹⁴⁵ Tibet was not going to replace China as the eastern engine. A more reasonable assumption from the Tibetan viewpoint would have been to see themselves as playing a middleman role, but the Chinese were hardly inclined to carry on a brisk silk trade to the profit of the Tibetans while at the same time being locked in a life-and-death struggle with them.

In the meantime, a new tribal confederation, the Uyghurs, had replaced the old Türk confederations controlling much of the steppe lands to the north and west. During the An Lushan rebellion, the Uyghurs had allied with the Tang and thereafter provided military support for the dynasty. But dependency always comes at a high price. For starters, the Tang made an annual payment of 20,000 rolls of silk. And even when the relationship was supposedly a matter of trade rather than outright tribute, the Uyghurs reaped one-sided profits. The Chinese were forced to buy large quantities of horses, many of questionable quality, at hugely inflated prices for rolls of silk. The Uyghurs then re-exported this silk westward, often amounting to hundreds of thousands of rolls annually.¹⁴⁶ Back in the Chinese capitals, cliques of eunuchs carried on the daily operations of government, gradually usurping the decision-making process from the emperors as the government became increasingly incompetent and corrupt. Tang China disintegrated in slow motion.

But trade did not end. Despite the wars, silk and other products continued to get through to the west overland in two ways: via the Uyghur extortion racket-cum-horse trade and by caravan traffic using the ancient detour over the Tian Shan mountains across the northern steppe roads described by Herodotus a millennium and a half earlier.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, long-distance overland commerce became more difficult and less efficient and thus more expensive and smaller in volume, an invitation for maritime trade to pick up the slack. South China had not been immune to the troubles of the Late

143 Boulnois, *Silk Roads*, 287–7.

144 Liu, *Silk Roads*, 102.

145 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*; Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*, 13, 55.

146 Barfield, “Inner Asia,” 39.

147 Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV.18–33.

Tang. In 773, officers in Guangzhou mutinied and set up their own government, which lasted three years. When imperial troops retook the city, the general in charge executed many merchants and confiscated their property, allegedly for having supported the rebels. On a more positive note, the Chinese were finding an increased demand around the Indian Ocean for a product that was surpassing silk in volume and value: porcelain.

If external trade underwent a shift during the Late Tang period, the domestic market was in the process of an even more profound transformation. The Tang government was broke. As a quick-fix measure in the 780s it simply confiscated 20 percent of every merchant's assets. The presence of foreign businessmen declined following the An Lushan rebellion, especially the Sogdians, many of whom were massacred on the assumption that they had been in cahoots with the rebels.¹⁴⁸ The Sogdian network that had integrated commerce across North China and into Central Asia dissolved. In both Chinese and Arab realms, the once ubiquitous Sogdians were absorbed, losing their identity as a separate people. In Chang'an, the cosmopolitan Western market, a beehive for foreign merchants, went into decline. Deep down in the internal commerce sector, however, more positive forces were at work. The government stopped trying to manage the marketplaces, which greatly stimulated trade. New marketplaces sprang up in response to local needs, and small marketplaces in rural areas proliferated. The circulation of goods increased, and commodity demand diversified and trickled downward from the capitals to regional centres and from there to smaller locales. During the subsequent Song period, new opportunities in the private sector would lead to a commercial revolution powered by the Chinese version of merchant capitalism.

If profound economic changes were taking shape deep within Chinese society, on the surface it appeared to be business as usual with the Tang dynasty on cruise control. The conflict with Tibet was finally resolved in 822, with the Tang formally renouncing its claims to Central Asia.¹⁴⁹ Less than two decades later, the Uyghur empire was obliterated overnight by their traditional enemies from the north, the Kirghiz. The Kirghiz had no intention of creating a new steppe-based empire, so they gathered their plunder and went back to where they came from. Like dominoes falling, the Tibetan empire collapsed two years later due to internal strife. By this time, the Tang were too weak to take advantage of this geopolitical void. Another protection racket was imposed on the Chinese by a new people, the Shatuo Turks, but the Shatuo could do nothing about the ongoing corruption and incompetence that permeated Chinese government administration or the heavy tax burden that was sapping the lifeblood of the peasantry. Even nature turned against China in the form of reoccurring droughts, floods, plagues, and other natural disasters. The Tang was losing the Mandate from Heaven. The social order began to dissolve. Desperate men turned to banditry, bandit gangs grew into small armies ravaging the countryside, and bandit armies advanced from pillage to revolution.¹⁵⁰

148 Yao, *Ngan Lou-chan*, 238–39, 254, 346; Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 220.

149 Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 158; Soucek, *Inner Asia*, 68.

150 Ebrey, *History of China*, 129; Schirokauer, *Brief History*, 126; Yule, *Cathay*, 132.

China's tumble into chaos hit its nadir with the Huang Chao rebellion, which started in 875. Huang Chao, a salt merchant turned bandit, appealed to the xenophobia of his followers, with foreign merchants as special targets. His army roamed at will across the country sacking cities and causing enormous destruction. In 879, he came to Guangzhou, the city that symbolized foreign trade. According to the Arab writer Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfi, who collected reports from travellers who had been in China, the rebels massacred 120,000 foreign merchants. Killing merchants, however, was not enough to ensure an end to foreign trade. Huang Chao ordered his men to cut down all the mulberry trees they could find since mulberry leaves were the food for silkworms. With no silk there would be no trade.

The massacre of the merchants and the decimation of the mulberry trees produced the desired effect: it stopped maritime trade with the Westerners completely, according to Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfi.¹⁵¹ Survivors packed up and returned home in droves; merchants from the West had lost confidence in China's ability to provide a secure place for doing business. Once again, Arab traders who were still eager to obtain East Asian products did so at a safer distance, like the ports of Kalah on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and Palembang in Sumatra.¹⁵² Eventually, Muslim traders would return to Chinese ports after the Tang problem had been resolved: there was simply too much money to be made. In 884, the Shatuo Turks finally defeated the forces of Huang Chao. By this time China had fragmented into a hodgepodge of jostling provinces turned principalities. With the countryside approaching anarchy and few merchants coming, the trade of Guangzhou dried up. In any case, Chang'an, the ultimate consumer market in China, had also been the ultimate target for plunder and had little surplus wealth to pay for imported luxuries. Zhu Wen had been an officer in Huang Chao's army, who afterward served the Tang. In 901, he took control of Chang'an. Four years later he began systematically to kill off members of the Tang family including the emperor. When the job was complete, he declared himself the new emperor, the founder of a new dynasty. It would last sixteen years.¹⁵³

The 'Abbāsīd caliphate did not suffer a single event comparable to the An Lushan rebellion. Its fall was slow and multifaceted, more a rot than a sudden tumble. Its woes started with the failure to adopt a standardized system of succession. Ruling caliphs generally tried to name their successors, but their wishes were often challenged. Civil war and the resulting chaos disrupted and finally paralyzed the government. As described by al-Mas'ūdī, the city of Baghdad, marvel of the Islamic world, was not off-limits, suffering siege, capture, and devastation twice.¹⁵⁴ On-and-off bouts of instability resonating from the caliphal household punctuated by occasional episodes of murder and civil war would not have necessarily condemned the caliphate to oblivion if the rest of the government had worked competently. Increasingly it did not. Corruption, inefficiency, administrative anarchy, fratricidal civil wars, and never-ending frontier wars are expensive activities

151 al-Sīrāfi, *Akḥbār al-Šīn wa 'l-Hind*, 41–42, 45.

152 Meglio, "Arab Trade."

153 Mote, *Imperial China*, 7.

154 al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 151–59.

for a government to maintain. Nevertheless, back in the capital, a declining treasury did not put a damper on extravagance and waste. The caliphate went from being chronically strapped for money to being effectively bankrupt.¹⁵⁵

Many of the problems the later caliphate experienced were rooted in changes in the military. Over the course of the civil wars, the regular army had been replaced by a new type of military machine based on mercenaries and slave soldiers from the fringes of the empire, particularly from the Turkish tribes of Central Asia.¹⁵⁶ Some rose through the ranks to high command and became military governors, and, for a while, the Turks provided the glue that helped to keep the caliphate from collapsing. Turkish leaders, however, never solved the problem that had started the caliphate's slide in the first place. The government could not pay for itself, and with soldiers in charge the priority now became one of paying troops. Factions within the army competed for diminishing resources, one cohort against another. Merchants and the productive elements of urban society had never been stakeholders in the ruling elite, but now the military co-opted even the civilian bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, the economy became as unfixable as the political system. With income from the provinces shrinking, the government turned to the *iqta'* system, under which the military was paid in grants of land and villages. Such grants were not permanent and were considered as earnings to be collected directly by the beneficiary. This had disastrous consequences for agriculture since the beneficiary had no incentive for making improvements but only in extracting as much as he could in as short a time as possible. Peasants abandoned the land and fled their villages as farmlands became wastelands. The gulf between rich and poor grew wider. In the commercial classes the great merchants lived in a completely different world than their small-scale colleagues. It was a matter of capital and how far up or down the wholesale–retail continuum one stood. Small merchants might have shops and petty traders stalls, while peddlers sold their goods out of sacks or wagons. Artisans and craftsmen also engaged in retail directly. One circumstance they shared: all who were engaged in trade and commerce were subjected to crushing taxes.¹⁵⁷ The money situation deteriorated. A shortage of metals led to a drop in the production of legitimate coins, debasement, and counterfeiting. In making transactions, merchants weighed rather than counted coins by the late ninth century, a situation that was still evident in Iraq a century later as noted by al-Muqaddasī.¹⁵⁸ The decline of caliphate coinage did not spell the end of the great commercial creation that had once spanned much of the civilized world, but it was symptomatic, one element in a large, complex process that interwove economic, social, and political variables into a trajectory of decline. More evident signs were manifest in many little and several large social upheavals that rocked the caliphate in the late ninth and tenth centuries.

155 Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed*, 157.

156 Pipes, *Slave Soldiers*; Sinor, "Inner Asian Warriors."

157 Ashtor, *Social and Economic*, 148–49.

158 al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 117; Album, *Islamic Coins*, 6, 25.

The most important were the Zanj rebellion (869–883 CE) and the Qaramita movement (903–939 CE).

The Zanj rebellion was a great slave revolt centred in southern Iraq.¹⁵⁹ For a few well-connected merchants who supplied the caliphate armies and who were in a position to take advantage of the scraps of war that unforeseen opportunities always create, the Zanj rebellion was a windfall. For almost everyone else, it was a disaster. Zanj armies wreaked havoc and devastation, plundering cities, pillaging caravans, intercepting ships, and disrupting or closing overland routes. The single greatest disaster came in 871 with the fall of the city of Basra, during which, al-Masʿūdī claims, the Zanj killed 300,000 people.¹⁶⁰ Eventually, caliphate armies quelled the rebellion only to face, a generation later, an even bigger threat. The Qaramita movement was grounded in both social discontent and religious fervour fanned by missionaries from the Ismaili branch of Shia Islam. The Qaramita enjoyed its greatest success in and around Bahrain, which held a pivotal position in Persian Gulf trade. The movement there may have been started by a flour dealer who successfully rallied the local Bedouin against his fellow merchants. However, the Qaramita leadership in Bahrain soon came to realize that they could increase their wealth and power much more by promoting the interests of their merchants. Their goal was to control the Persian Gulf, thus threatening the caliphate's connection with the Indian Ocean. To the north, the Qaramita ravaged much of lower Iraq with related groups operating in Syria and Arabia. After 939, when peace was finally concluded, the Qaramita government in Bahrain settled into a mostly peaceful existence in which it grew prosperous by collecting tolls on various trade routes, including those to Mecca, and on Persian Gulf shipping.¹⁶¹

By the time the Qaramita settled into their nook of the Persian Gulf, the 'Abbāsīd heartland had been drained of its vitality. In the urban areas a large segment of the most enterprising and productive elements of the population, including merchants, began to emigrate to places as far away as Spain, the oases of the Sahara, and Central Asia. Those in the business world who stayed behind faced increasing challenges. The entrepreneurial element of the population was never sufficiently organized to nudge its way into the halls of power, and no class of rich and politically connected merchants evolved to exert a steady stream of influence on government policy. Thus, the gap between the world of business and that of government was never bridged, and, as a result, the economy did not come under the control of those who made it work. Rather, the economy became an instrument directed in the interests of those who controlled the government.¹⁶² Devoid of institutional power, merchants were vulnerable, private property was often at risk, and successful businesses were advertisements for plunder. The example was set at the top. When the government needed money, which was most of the time, it often raised it by imposing fines for one arbitrary reason or another on wealthy individuals.

159 Popovic, *Revolt*.

160 al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 317–18.

161 Kennedy, *Prophet*, 289–90.

162 Sivers, "Taxes and Trade," 90; Ashtor, *Social and Economic*, 149.

The government also forced merchants to buy goods from it at grossly inflated prices. High officials could demand “loans” from merchants, which both parties understood would never be repaid.

On the long-distance trade scene, routes were shifting and not in favour of the caliphate. At sea, unsettled conditions caused much business first to relocate from the upper Persian Gulf dominated by the Basra-to-Baghdad nexus to ports in the lower Gulf and in the tenth century farther on to Aden, the Red Sea, and Egypt, bringing cargoes much closer to a reviving Mediterranean trade.¹⁶³ Nor could the caliphate compensate for the loss of its maritime connections with a vigorous overland long-distance trade revival. Quite the contrary: the government in Baghdad gradually lost control over its section of the silk roads. Centrifugal forces had finally caught up to an empire that was far too big geographically and too diverse demographically to survive indefinitely. Disintegration began in the peripheral provinces and moved inward until it reached Iraq. Outright rebellion occurred in some places, but in most the central government was simply ignored: for practical purposes the caliphate had become irrelevant.

If the Muslim community did not maintain its political unity, it did maintain a remarkable degree of cultural, religious, artistic, and intellectual integration. As for trade and commerce, behind its hegemonic façade, the Islamic world economy was a fairly delicate creature. It was low on many resources beginning with wood, water, metals, and people as witnessed by the largely one-way flow of slaves from all directions into the Islamic heartland. For its prosperity the caliphate had depended on human creations like cities and entrepôts, infrastructures, and trade routes. Its commercial economy never became as integrated as that of China since too much of its trade had to go overland instead of by river or along coasts, raising prices and cutting into profits. And its land area was too vast and included too much unproductive wasteland.

Nevertheless, most of the gigantic, cohesive, interlinked world economic machine that was the Islamic heartland under the caliphate did not disintegrate even as the political system did. Its counterpart, Tang China, left an equally impressive accomplishment. The Han period had given China a great legacy: connection into the overland trade system now known as the silk roads. The Tang period left China with a parallel legacy: connection into the maritime trade system that would bind East Asia to the Indian Ocean and beyond. Under the succeeding Song dynasty (960–1276), the Superintendency of Maritime Trade reappeared, and long-distance maritime trade was declared a state monopoly. By the twelfth century, Chinese sailors were venturing to the Malabar Coast,¹⁶⁴ and soon thereafter a Chinese port official was able to write an account about foreign peoples and their products ranging from Basra and Baghdad to Sicily and south Spain that was cutting-edge geography for its time.¹⁶⁵ Patterns of maritime trade

163 Hoffmann, “Interdependencies,” 127–28.

164 Clark, “Frontier Discourse,” 29; Yoshinobu, “Sung Foreign Trade,” 106; Bentley, *Old World Encounters*, 106.

165 *Chau Ju-Kua*, in Hirth’s translation.

became integrated networks operating on a regular, continuous, and high-capacity basis replacing the haphazard, random, unsystematic forms of exchange that had existed previously. These new patterns would remain in place to the sixteenth century.

Historical process is a matter of transitions, and new forces in places like Egypt and Europe in one direction and Song dynasty China in the other were already stirring, all pieces of a puzzle of long-term trends coming together in a new configuration.

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Chapter 17

MIGRATION

Johannes Preiser-Kapeller

MIGRATION CAN BEEN defined as “permanent or long-term dislocation of the place of residence, both by individuals and by groups of any size.”¹ The earlier research focus on medieval phenomena of mass migration has been complemented with an attention on the mobility of smaller groups and its possible impacts for cultural change. Several forms of and motivations for the “dislocation of the place of residence” across various scales, both in terms of group size and of duration, will be described on the following pages. These will range from the single Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, whose almost twenty years of sojourn in India qualify for migration under the above-cited definition, to thousands of Slav prisoners of war deported from the Balkans to Anatolia. The spatial focus will be on Afro-Eurasia in general, especially beyond western Europe,² and on migrations between more distanced regions (in contrast to frequent movements between nearby places).

The “End” of the Period of “Barbarian Invasions” around 600 CE

The decades before 600 CE have been identified as the end of the period of “Barbarian invasions” into the (former) Roman sphere. The Lombard advance into Italy in 568—at the cost of the Eastern Roman Empire, which had “re-conquered” these territories in a devastating war during the thirty years before—is often interpreted as the “last” of the Germanic migrations of late antiquity.³ Around the same time, the Avars established themselves as heirs of the steppe empire of the Huns in the Carpathian Basin, but their arrival in the steppes to the north of the Black Sea in 557 also indicates more far-reaching political upheavals beyond Europe.⁴ Most probably (although this identification is still contested), a core element of the people now emerging as the Avars was constituted by groups of the Rouran, whose empire in the steppes north of China had been crashed in 552 by a new alliance of tribes under the leadership of the Gök Türks. The Türks in turn achieved dominance in the vast areas between China and the Caspian Sea, allying themselves also with the Persian empire of the Sasanians in 560 to conquer the realms of the Hephthalites, the last empire of what has been called the “Iranian Huns.” These various groups had migrated into the regions between Iran, Central Asia, and India since the mid fourth century and had troubled the neighbouring Sasanians and the Gupta empire

1 Borgolte, “Einführung,” 17–18.

2 Cf. also Kulke, *Mittelalter*.

3 Christie, *Lombards*.

4 Pohl, *Awaren* (also on the identification of the Avars with the Rouran); Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*.

in northern India, whose collapse around 500 was accelerated by the invasions of the “Hunas.”⁵ In the south of India, a period of crisis and fragmentation, which had started in the third century and which has been connected with the invasion of tribal groups called the “Kalabhra,” ended in the sixth century. A result of these developments was the rise of powerful new dynasties such as the Pallavas.⁶ The Turkic qaghanate in Central Asia also profited first from the political disunity to the south, in this case in China; there, the northern regions had since the fourth century been under changing “foreign” regimes of the so-called “Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians” (speakers of Mongolian, Turkic, and Sino-Tibetan languages), while separate polities existed in the south.⁷ But after his foundation of the new Sui dynasty in 581, Emperor Wendi, who himself stemmed from the mixed milieu of Chinese and non-Chinese elites that had emerged in the preceding centuries, was able not only to control the entire north but also to conquer the south of China in 588/589. Although the Sui dynasty fell from power again already under Wendi’s successor Yangdi in 618, the unification of China proved to be lasting under the following dynasty of the Tang until the early tenth century.⁸

The empires of western Afro-Eurasia, (eastern) Rome and (Sasanian) Persia, on the contrary, first mutually undermined their power with two long and devastating wars (571–590 and 602–628 CE) before being shattered by the newly emerged community (*ummah*) of Islam, under whose banner the now unified Arab tribes between 632 and 642 occupied the richest Roman provinces in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and in 652 conquered the Persian empire in its entirety. These campaigns included also large-scale movements of people into the new territories (see below). Moreover, since the sixth century, groups of Slavs had migrated across the entire Balkans as well as into eastern central Europe.⁹ This indicates that the “end” of one “migration period” only marked the start of another one. One factor intensifying these various crises in the late sixth and early seventh centuries may have been climate (see also [Chapter 18](#)); the “Late Antique Little Ice Age” between 536 and 660 brought about significantly cooler and more adverse climatic conditions across Afro-Eurasia. These also promoted the outbreak and diffusion of a major global plague epidemic, which returned in waves between 542 and 750, especially in the west of Afro-Eurasia and led to demographic depression in various areas.¹⁰ In any case, these phenomena may also allow us to define the period around 600 as a “turn of times” and deal with the migration history of the following 300 years separately from the centuries before.

5 Virkus, *Politische Strukturen*; Ferrier, *L’Inde des Gupta*, 180–206; Kulke and Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, 120–22; Baumer, *Central Asia*, 94–96; Alram, *Antlitz des Fremden*, 89–96; Rezakhani, *Reorienting the Sasanians*, 97–99, 104–24; Schmiedchen, “Indien,” 67–69.

6 Karashima, *South India*, 47–62; Singh, *Ancient and Early Medieval India*, 384–89; Kulke and Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, 133–34.

7 Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 73–77; Kuhn, *Weltgeschichte*, 159–61.

8 Lewis, *China between Empires*, 83–84, 239–58; Kuhn, *Weltgeschichte*, 163–65.

9 Hardt, “Slawen.”

10 Büntgen et al., “Cooling and Societal Change”; McCormick et al., “Climate Change.”

Elite and Imperial Mobility

Information is richest for the mobility and migrations of the uppermost echelon of society. Already before the period under consideration a web of diplomatic exchanges had emerged not only between the courts of neighbouring states but also between more distanced regions; from 651 to 798, for instance, no fewer than thirty embassies were sent by the Arabs to China.¹¹ Although it was not yet the period of permanent diplomatic representation, some of these exchanges led to longer-lasting settlements of individuals or groups. In 787, the high Tang official Li Mi brought charges against the many foreigners living at the state's expense in the Chinese capital Chang'an, including members of embassies from kingdoms in western Central Asia, who had been cut off from their homelands due to constant fighting between Chinese, Uighurs, and Tibetans. Some of these 4,000 people lived in Chang'an for more than forty years, starting families and acquiring land. Li Mi wanted to enforce the repatriation of these people, but failed.¹² In cases of clear differences of power and rank, members of ruling families themselves paid their respect to foreign rulers; in 836, for instance, Prince George, son of King Zacharias of Makuria in Nubia, travelled first to *al-Fusṭāṭ* in Egypt and from there to Baghdad to Caliph al-Mu'taṣim to obtain a reduction of the tribute payments agreed upon in a contract with the Arabs in 652.¹³

Prearranged, permanent changes of residence included the marriage of (female) members of a dynasty with foreign rulers, often to seal peace agreements or alliances. Yet, as the granting of the hand of an imperial princess was a rare privilege at the Byzantine or the Chinese courts, for instance, the negotiations about this issue were often particularly complicated. One prominent case is the Chinese princess Wen-cheng, who in 641 became the bride of the Tibetan emperor Srong btsan sgam po. She and her retinue also acted as important carriers of Buddhism into Tibet.¹⁴ In this regard, the wider implications of this royal marriage for the transfer of people and ideas is comparable with the one of Anna, sister of the Byzantine emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025), to Grand Prince Vladimir I of Kiev in 988, which was accompanied by Vladimir's baptism and the definite beginning of the Christianization of Russia.¹⁵ Other members of ruling houses, as many of their subjects, migrated due to external pressure. Famous examples are the Sasanian prince Peroz (Chinese: *Bilusi*) and his son Narses (Chinese: *Ninieshi*), who after the collapse of the Persian empire in 652, first held out at the northeastern periphery of their former realm, hoping for Chinese support for a campaign against the Arabs. When this did not materialize, they moved to the Tang capital Chang'an, where

11 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 111–12, 137–40, 149–50; Bielenstein, *Six Dynasties*, 353–59; Schottenhammer, *Yang Liangyaos*; Geary et al., "Courtly Cultures."

12 Thilo, *Chang'an*, 77–78; Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*.

13 Troupeau, "Kirchen und Christen," 446–49; Bechhaus-Gerst, "Nubier"; Fauvelle, *Goldene Rhinozeros*, 43–59.

14 Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*, 11–26; Brück, *Religion und Politik*, 50–54; Beckwith, *Empires*, 127–30; Baumer, *Frühes Christentum*, 272–81.

15 Panagopoulou, *Diplomatikoi gamoi*.

they were received with honours and stayed until the end of their lives in 679 and 707, respectively.¹⁶ Definitely against his will, Prince Aryuna from northern India was brought to Chang'an in 649; the year before, some of his troops had attacked a Chinese embassy under the command of general Wang Hsüan-tse. To take revenge, Wang Hsüan-tse secured support from the emperor of Tibet, then ally of the Tang due to the royal wedding of 641 (see above), and hired mercenaries from Nepal. With these forces, the Chinese defeated Aryuna and brought him to Chang'an as a captive.¹⁷

Beyond these individuals and their retinues, the diffusion and maintenance of imperial rule included the "occupational" mobility and migration of elites at large (as well as other parts of the population; see below), within and beyond their immediate borders. Imperial formations have thus been described as "regimes of entanglements," establishing enduring axes of mobility within their sphere of influence.¹⁸ Within the Roman empire, the career of an army commander such as Artabanes Arsakides between 539 and 554 included longer stays in Asia Minor, Constantinople, North Africa, Italy, and the Balkans, across all of the remaining provinces of the empire at that time. Unsurprisingly, Artabanes stemmed from Armenia, one of the main regions of origin of commanders and manpower for the Roman/Byzantine army from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, 30 percent of families of the Byzantine empire's military elite were of Armenian origin, in addition to families coming from Slavonic-speaking areas, the steppes (Pechenegs, Magyars), or the Islamic world.¹⁹

The rapid expansion of the caliphate from the Mediterranean to North Africa and Spain as well as to Iran, Central Asia, and the borders of India, was also accompanied by large migrations of elites and their followers from the Arabian Peninsula to these areas. It soon became clear that the new arrivals did not represent a homogeneous mass but consisted of different, even competing groups, mostly linked by tribal loyalties, who by no means always acted according to central planning. Although Eva Orthmann has relativized the fundamental division into southern Arabian tribes (Yaman) and north Arabian groups (Qais) assumed in earlier research, our sources at least describe the smaller-scale tribal classifications as relevant to the dynamics of Arab immigration.²⁰ The Islamic expansion set also other ethnic groups in motion, such as Berbers from North Africa who played a decisive role in the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711; there, they settled alongside the Arabs, but soon saw themselves disadvantaged as "second-class" Muslims. This resulted in a major uprising in 740, which shattered the Umayyad caliph's rule in Spain. It could only be re-established with the transfer of 7,000 Arab troops from the core area of Umayyad rule in Syria. These soldiers also permanently settled in various places of the Iberian Peninsula and later formed one group of supporters of the

¹⁶ Thilo, *Chang'an*, 73–74; Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia*, 37–38; Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 49.

¹⁷ Thilo, *Chang'an*, 9–10, 72–76; Bielenstein, *Six Dynasties*, 72–74; Devahuti, *Harsha*, 259–62.

¹⁸ Schuppert, *Verflochtene Staatlichkeit*.

¹⁹ Preiser-Kapeller, "Complex Processes"; Pahlitzsch, "Byzanz," 97–99.

²⁰ Orthmann, *Stamm und Macht*; Preiser-Kapeller, "Complex Processes"; Berger, "Muslimische Welt," 131–35.

Umayyad prince ‘Abd al-Rahmān when he fled from the overthrow and massacre of his family by the ‘Abbāsids in 750.²¹ The ‘Abbāsids had also profited from the dissatisfaction of non-Arab neo-Muslims in the areas of eastern Iran and Central Asia and found supporters among regional elites there; these groups now migrated in the retinue of the first ‘Abbāsids to Iraq, where the new capital of Baghdad was founded in 762, as well as into other provinces of the caliphate, where they helped to enforce the power of the new dynasty often into competition with the abovementioned Arab elites.²² Among the most prominent of these early supporters of the ‘Abbāsids were the Barmakids, descendants of a Buddhist priest family in Balkh (in present-day Afghanistan), who converted to Islam but preserved interest in their former religious-cultural milieu. Yahya, son of Khālid ibn Barmak, even rose to the vizierate at the court of caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809 CE). The Barmakids, however, are equally an example of the constant “circulation” of elites; in 803, they fell out of favour with the caliph and lost their offices and possessions.²³ According to the will of Hārūn ar-Rashīd, the empire was to be co-governed by his sons al-Amīn (in Baghdad) and al-Ma’mūn (in Merw in the southeast of present-day Turkmenistan) after his death (809 CE). However, there was soon a split between the brothers; al-Ma’mūn used his position in the east—in the areas of the origin of the ‘Abbāsīd revolt—to recruit new followers among the regional elites. These included members of Sogdian and Turkic princely families, who had remained in opposition to the caliphate since the early eighth century.²⁴ In addition, al-Ma’mūn extended his entourage with followers of a new category, warrior slaves (*mamlūks*), who were acquired mainly among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia or north of the Caucasus (such as the Khazars).²⁵ With this new army, al-Ma’mūn was able to defeat his brother al-Amīn in 813, and in the years that followed he crushed the rebellions that broke out in various provinces such as Azerbaijan and Egypt. When al-Ma’mūn moved his residence from Merw to Baghdad in 819, his followers from the “Far East” and their families were settled in the *Ḥarbīyya* district, northwest of the central circular city. These new favourites of the caliph, however, awakened the displeasure of the indigenous population and long-established elites (including descendants of the former immigrants from that region, who had come to Baghdad sixty years earlier); they protested against the harassment by the “barbarian” newcomers. As their numbers increased again under al-Ma’mūn’s brother and successor al-Mu‘taṣim (r. 833–842 CE), there were violent clashes in the capital. Therefore, the caliph in 836 decided to build a new capital in Samarra north of Baghdad, where he settled his troops and their families.²⁶ However, *mamlūk*

21 Marboe, *Burgos nach Cuzco*, 57–70; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, 338–41; Sénac, *Charlemagne*, 113–27; Branco and Wolf, “Berber und Araber.”

22 Preiser-Kapeller, “Complex Processes”; Preiser-Kapeller, *Jenseits von Rom*.

23 Bladel, “Bactrian Background.”

24 Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra*, 39–40, 131–38; Stark, *Alttürkenzeit*, 236–39.

25 Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 74–80; Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 15–36; Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled*, 91–111, 213–16; Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra*, 106–13, 150–94.

26 Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 20–21, 47–55; Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra*, 188–94; Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled*, 217–19. Northedge, *Samarra*, 97–99.

commanders used the resulting isolation of the caliph within his guard troops to further their influence. Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861 CE), the son of al-Mu‘tašim, attempted to reverse this loss of power and planned to move his residence away from Samarra. However, his reign ended with his assassination by a group of mamlūk generals in 861. This unleashed a major weakening of the central power in the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, which led to an increasing fragmentation of the empire.²⁷

Migrant elites from Central Asia also played a decisive role in the history of the Chinese empire. Several hundred clans rich in material as well as cultural capital, whose origins could be traced back to several generations before the reunification of China at the end of the sixth century, formed the core of the aristocracy of the Sui and Tang periods. In the north, long-established and new immigrant clans had often merged with each other since the fourth century. An early clan register for the regulation (and limitation) of the aristocracy in 637/638 recorded 1,641 families with 293 different clan names. Their members, however, faced competition that was also promoted by the emperors, such as from representatives of new foreign elites, who made a career especially in the military.²⁸ In particular, from the time of Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649 CE), who had himself venerated as “paternal” ruler of both the Chinese and the “barbarians,” the number of “foreigners” in the service of the empire increased. The western expansion had led the Tang forces to western Central Asia near the border of Iran (where the Arabs established their rule at that time, see above), including the regions of Sogdia with the famous city-states of Samarkand and Bukhara (now in Uzbekistan). Already in the third century, Sogdian merchants had extended their networks to the capitals of China (see below). As in the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate (see above), they were followed by members of the aristocratic elites, who made their careers in the administration and army of China since the sixth century. This trend continued even more under the Sui and Tang, as in the caliphate’s case, intensifying also conflicts between newcomers from the frontiers and established court circles.²⁹ They erupted in the rebellion of An Lushan, a general of Turco-Sogdian origin, who even captured the Tang’s capitals of Luoyang and Chang’an in 756 and declared himself emperor; although his own followers assassinated him in 757, it took six more years to re-establish Tang rule. During these fights, there were also some attacks and massacres of foreign communities, such as Sogdian “compatriots” of An Lushan (see below). But since the defeat of the rebellion was again only possible with aid from the steppe, this time of the Uighurs, the Tang empire remained open to immigrant elites. They became again victims of violent attacks, increasingly in the last

²⁷ Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 37–40, 80–90; Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra*, 203–36, 259–62; Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled*, 231–42, 261–69; Northedge, *Samarra*, 121, 239–41; Berger, “Muslimische Welt,” 136.

²⁸ Thilo, *Chang’an*, 46–59; Lewis, *China between Empires*, 195–206, 273–74; Schottenhammer, *Yang Liangyaos*, 55–57.

²⁹ Wertmann, *Sogdians in China*; Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra*, 59–88, 95–106; Gordon, *Thousand Swords*, 40–41; Stark, *Alltürkenzeit*, 240–47; Skaff, “Sogdian Trade Diaspora”; Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 15–17, 75–104; Lewis, *China between Empires*, 63–67, 71–72, 150; Thilo, *Chang’an*, 71–72; Glahn, *Economic History*, 159–68.

decades of the Tang Dynasty. This happened first from 840 onwards after the collapse of the Uighur empire during the reign of Emperor Wuzong (840–846), who persecuted the adherents of “foreign” cults such as Manichaeism (popular among the Uighurs), Christianity, and especially Buddhism. In subsequent uprisings and civil wars until the end of the third century, migrants and foreign traders were also repeatedly attacked and killed (see also below).³⁰

Among those foreigners were also member of the elites from neighbouring Korean polities and from Japan, for whom China always was an important cultural model. While some of these individuals stayed in the Tang empire and even made careers, others returned to their homelands with new skills and ideas. Migrants from Korea especially also became important carriers of Chinese knowledge and technologies to the emerging Japanese empire. A register of genealogies of the Japanese nobility from 815 lists an origin in Korea or from other places on the mainland for one-third of the 1,200 elite families.³¹ Similarly, via sea routes, the migration of Indian elites played a significant role in Southeast Asia’s political and cultural development; in scholarship, there exist various scenarios for this process. The “Kshatriya theory” assumed the migration and reign of Indian princes (from the Kshatriya caste) over local populations, underestimating the initiative of local elites who had established major principalities even before the arrival of larger groups from India. The “Vaishya theory” considered Indian traders to be the most important transmitter of knowledge; however, since this knowledge came from the religious and political sphere that circulated in other groups of Indian societies, the merchants are unlikely carriers. Also, the first principalities of “Indian style” originated in the mountainous hinterland of Southeast Asia and not at the commercial places of the coast. Thus, one now assumes a crucial role of Brahmins and Buddhist monks, who followed the invitations of local princes and in addition to religious knowledge transferred skills of state-building, crafts, and law.³²

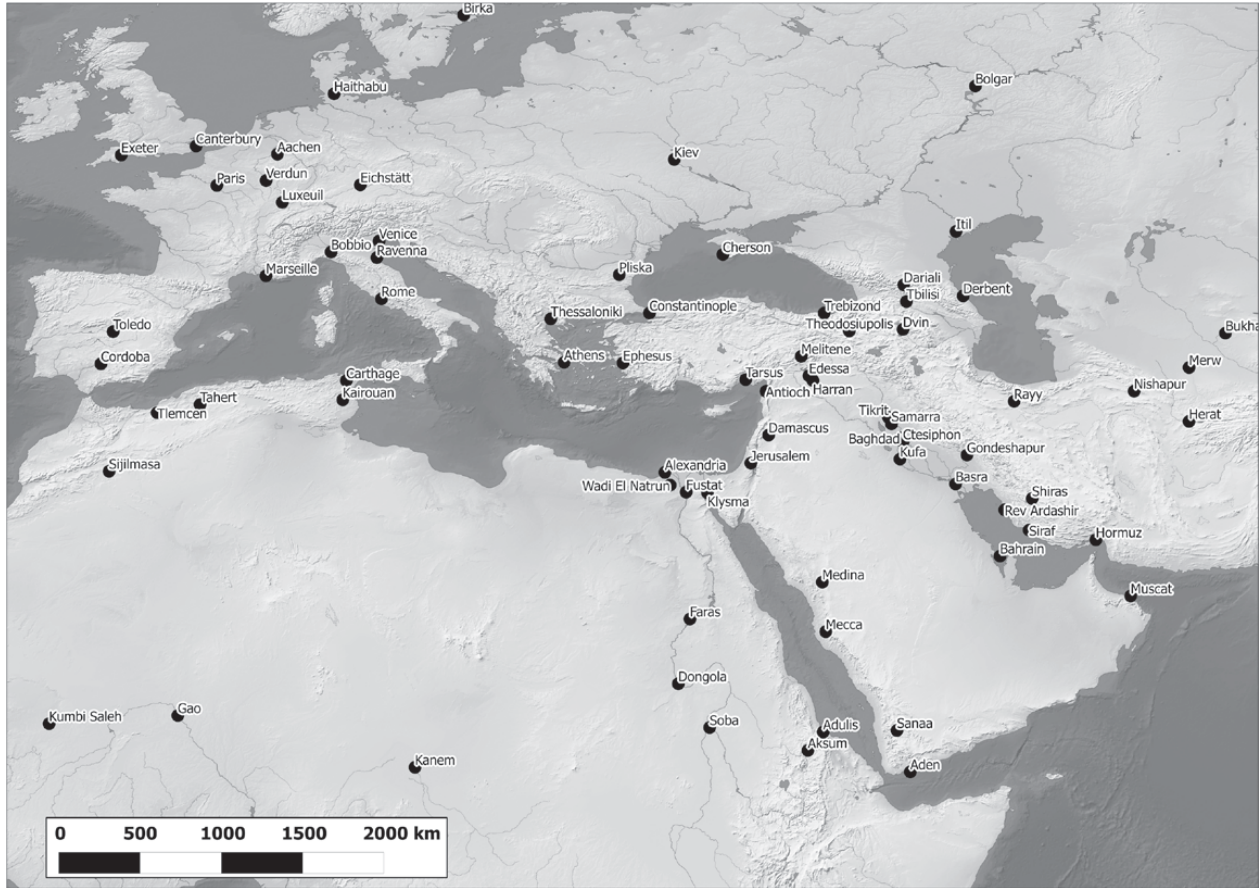
Religious Mobility and Migration

The transfer of Buddhism and Hinduism and of their religious experts to Southeast Asia in turn motivated further mobility and migration. In the seventh century, the kingdom of Srivijaya with the centre in Palembang (see [Map 16](#)) on Sumatra established itself both as central hub of trade and of Buddhist scholarship, attracting monks from India and China. A king of the neighbouring Sailendra dynasty in Java appointed a monk from Bengal as his head guru in 782. Even a temple in central Java, according to an inscription from

30 Somers, “End of the T’ang”; Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 14–16; Thilo, *Chang’an*, 24–28, 83–84; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 272–75; Beckwith, *Empires*, 170–72; Kuhn, *Weltgeschichte*, 175–76; Glahn, *Economic History*, 210–13, 227.

31 Bielenstein, *Six Dynasties*, 101–6; Lewis, *China between Empires*, 154–55; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 153–56; Kreiner, *Geschichte Japans*, 42–93; Vollmer, “Isoliertes Inselland”; Kuhn, *Weltgeschichte*, 199–209; Anderson, *Food and Environment*, 161; Glahn, *Economic History*, 200; Vollmer, “Japan,” 39–40.

32 Ptak, *Maritime Seidenstraße*, 89–93; Kulke/Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, 195–201.



Map 15. Important destinations in western Afro-Eurasia.

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around 800, was built due to the donations “of the Buddhist believers always coming from Gujarat [in Northwest India, an area of emigration of Buddhist and Hindu groups due to Arab invasions]” to that area. Around the same time, the huge temple complexes of Borobudur (Buddhist) and of Prambanan (Hindu) were created on Java, illustrating the mobility of people, ideas, and architectural models between India and Southeast Asia. In turn, the rulers of Srivijaya turned their favour to the famous Buddhist university of Nalanda (now in the Indian state of Bihar), where King Balaputra had a monastery built around 860, also for accommodating students coming from his realm to India.³³

India as “holy land” of Buddhism also attracted pilgrims from China; the famous monk Faxien, who travelled from South China to India in 399 and returned in 412, in the seventh century was followed by Xuanzang, who left for India in 627 and stayed there until 643, bringing back more than 600 Buddhist texts and 150 relics. Between 671 and 695, the monk Yi Jing (635–713 CE) also travelled to India and Sri Lanka.³⁴ Not only relics, but also Buddhist scholars came from India to China; Jnanagupta from Gandhara (d. 604 CE) and Dharmagupta (d. 619 CE) migrated to China as early as the late sixth century. In 716, the famous Tantra master Subhakarasiṃha (637–735 CE) arrived in the empire of the Tang from the abovementioned Buddhist university in Nalanda. Shortly thereafter, by sea via Sri Lanka, the Indian Vajrabodhi (671–741 CE) travelled to southern China and from there to Chang’an. His student Amoghavajra was born in 705 in Samarkand as the son of an Indian father and a Sogdian mother, and migrated to China at the age of nine. In 741, Amoghavajra pilgrimaged with some companions to Sri Lanka and India, from where he returned in 746 with 500 manuscripts. Beyond these prominent figures, hundreds of monks came to China to study and worship at the centres of Buddhism emerging there, especially from Tibet, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan, where the teachings of Buddha had arrived via China between the fourth and sixth centuries. The Japanese monk Ennin (794–864 CE) wrote a famous description of his long stay in China; he also witnessed the anti-Buddhist persecutions of the 840s (see above).³⁵

Via the trade routes of Central Asia, in addition to Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Christianity were also “imported” to China by migrants. The most important source for the history of the Christian church in Tang China is an inscription from 781. According to this text, in the year 635, a Christian priest named Aluoben from Persia came to Chang’an, perhaps as a member of a delegation of the Sasanians. Probably in this official capacity, Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649 CE) received Aluoben. In 638, the emperor declared Christianity one of the approved cults and allowed the building of the first church in the capital. Shortly after 712, a bishop Gabriel arrived as a delegate from the church headquarters in Iraq, now with an Arab embassy, in the capital of the

33 Brück, *Religion und Politik*, 136–50; Ptak, *Maritime Seidenstraße*, 122–26; Kulke/Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, 143, 150–52, 201–4; Schmiedchen, “Indien,” 75–77.

34 Sen, *Buddhism*; Thilo, *Chang’an*, 310–14, 337–38; Bielenstein, *Six Dynasties*, 82–83; Lewis, *China between Empires*, 161–62; Glahn, *Economic History*, 196–200; Kulke and Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, 113–16, 140–42; Kuhn, *Weltgeschichte*, 257–58; Bechert and Gombrich, *Buddhismus*, 72–73.

35 Thilo, *Chang’an*, 79, 87–88, 314–20; Sen, *Buddhism*; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 214–16; Kuhn, *Weltgeschichte*, 260–69; Lohse, “Asketen,” 272.

Tang; in 732 and 744, additional groups of monks and another bishop named George migrated to China. Before 781, the main initiator of the stele Yisi (probably the same as Mar Yazdbozid in Syriac sources) arrived in Chang'an, appointed as bishop by Mar Hanan-Isho II (774–780 CE), the Catholicos of the Assyrian Church of the East in Ctesiphon. This period, however, marks the culmination of Christian life in “cosmopolitan” Tang China, where sentiment turned against “foreign” cults over the next decades. The prohibition of these religions under Emperor Wuzong (840–846 CE) affected Christianity as well as Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism (see above). The relative sizes of these communities illustrates the number of 265,000 Buddhist monks and nuns, who were affected by imperial politics, in contrast to a total of 3,000 Christian and Zoroastrian clerics (who were grouped together as “Persians”). While Buddhism was able to recover after the death of Wuzong in 846, Christian life in China was permanently disturbed. When Catholicos Abdisho I of Baghdad (963–986 CE) sent six monks to China in 980, they found that Christianity there was largely extinct. Apparently, the community, especially among the natives, had not reached the “critical mass” that would have allowed it to survive even without constant immigration from the west.³⁶ In general, the Assyrian (“Nestorian”) Church of the East, from its centre in Iraq, had established wide-ranging networks of communities, as can be deduced from the migration of Christians and the conversion of far-flung indigenous populations. Already in the period of Catholicos Ishoyahb III (650–658 CE), there existed “outer” bishoprics in Rev Ardashir and in Djibal in Iran, in Merw (now in Turkmenistan), in Herat (now in Afghanistan), in Sogdia (with a metropolis in Samarkand), as well as in Turkestan in Central Asia, in India and in China (see above).³⁷ Also within the Islamic empire, the various Christian communities maintained a considerable degree of mobility; at the beginning of the ninth century for instance, a community of Syrian monks from Tikrit in Iraq settled in the Dayr al-Suryan monastery in Wadi El Natrun, west of the Nile delta.³⁸ An unplanned expansion far to the east occurred in 762, when the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Mansūr (754–775) deported the remaining inhabitants of the ancient Persian capital of Seleukia-Ctesiphon to the Tashkent region on the occasion of the founding of Baghdad, including many Christians. Patriarch Theodore I of Antioch (750–773) established the catholicate of Romagyris at this easternmost outpost of his church. To the mobility of clerics within the caliphate also bears witness the life of Theodore Abu Qurrah (d. 830), who was born around 750 in Edessa (today Şanlıurfa in southeastern Turkey). A few years after entering the Sabas monastery near Jerusalem as a monk, he was consecrated bishop of Harran near his native Edessa but made several trips to the neighbouring churches in Armenia and Egypt.³⁹

36 Standaert, *Christianity in China*, 2–42; Kordoses, “T’ang China”; Baumer, *Frühes Christentum*, 171, 183–96; Troupeau, “Kirchen und Christen,” 457–58; Thilo, *Chang’an*, 353–59; Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 68–71; Bladel, “Bactrian Background,” 53–54; Chen, “Roman-Greek World,” 321–22.

37 Fiey, *Oriens Christianus Novus*; Troupeau, “Kirchen und Christen,” 453–55; Ball, *Rome in the East*, 140–41; Baumer, *Frühes Christentum*, 12–20, 29–35, 47–55, 65–95; Garsoïan, “Persien,” 1165–73; Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia*, 77–80.

38 Swanson, *Coptic Papacy*; Troupeau, “Kirchen und Christen,” 435–46.

39 Dick, *Les Melkites*; Troupeau, “Kirchen und Christen,” 399–422.

Beyond the borders of the caliphate, Egyptian clerics regularly came as bishops to Aksum in modern-day Ethiopia, such as a monk from a monastery in Wadi El Natrun in the time of Patriarch Jacob of Alexandria (819–830).⁴⁰ Even closer contacts existed between the church of Egypt and the Christian kingdoms in Nubia (now Sudan), where the capital cities of Faras, Dongola, and Soba (see [Map 15](#)) were seats of bishops consecrated by the patriarch of Alexandria.⁴¹ As in the case of the secular elites, clerics and pilgrims from Armenia were highly mobile not only to the traditional sites on Mount Sinai or in the Holy Land (where permanent Armenian monastic communities emerged) within the borders of the caliphate. They also travelled to places in the Byzantine empire, such as Trebizond—where in the 630s the scholar Ananias of Shirak found a teacher of mathematics—or Constantinople. There, between 713 and 717, Stephan from the province Siwnik studied and also travelled to Athens and Rome. On the Tiber in the seventh century, an Armenian monastic community had established itself in the monastery of Renati.⁴²

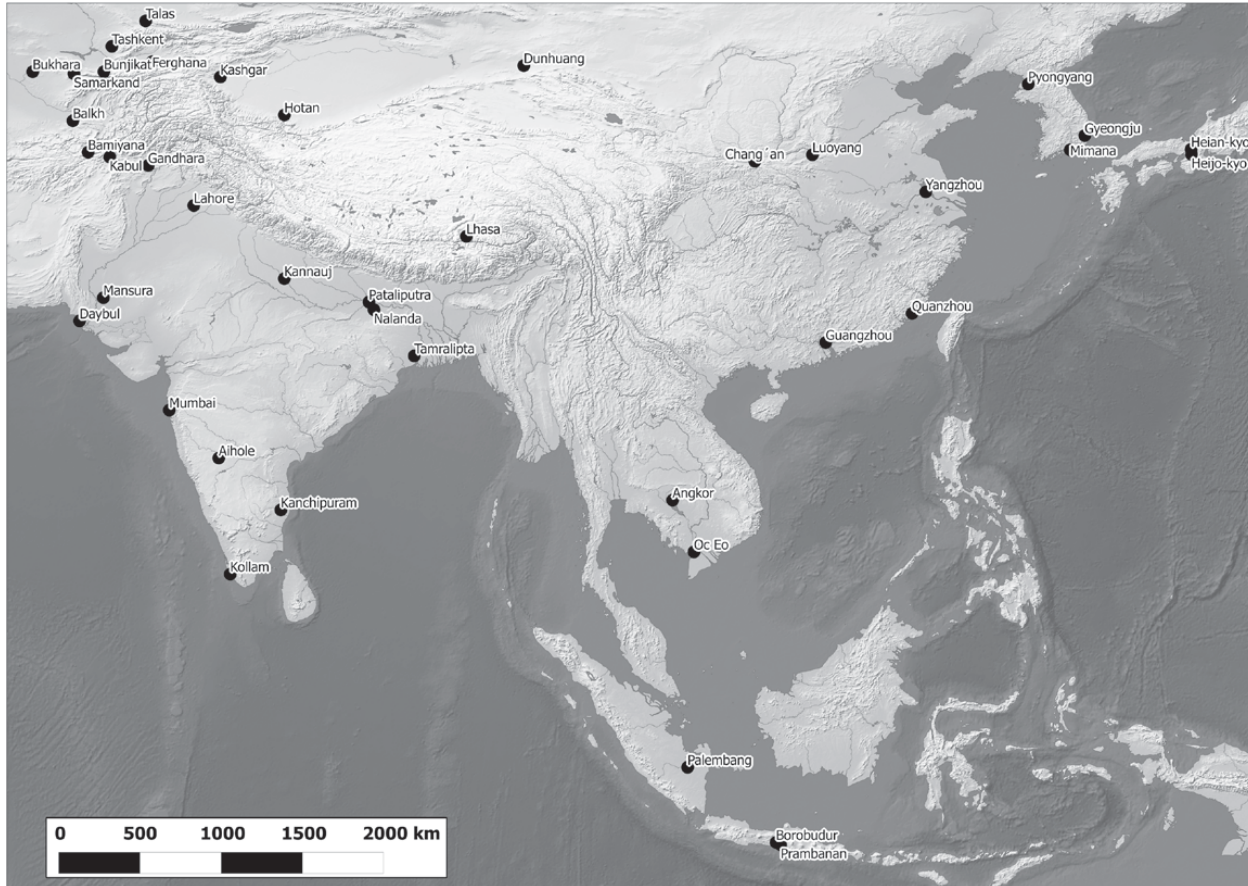
Also in post-Roman western Europe, the networks of the Christian church brought about mobility and migration over long distances. In 597, Pope Gregory I (590–604) sent Augustinus from Rome to England with several companions to work for the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons. In 601, the pope dispatched further missionaries and established an archbishopric in Canterbury. Its subsequent archbishops until the end of the seventh century came mostly from Rome, including Theodore (669–690), who was born in ca. 600 in Tarsus in Asia Minor and then entered the service of the Roman church. In addition, clerics and monks from Ireland participated in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Monks from Ireland and Britain equally sought as a special form of sacrifice the permanent “pilgrimage” to scarcely or non-Christianized areas of the continent. The Irishman Columban (540–615 CE), for instance, founded the Abbey of Luxeuil in Burgundy in 590 and then, in 614, the monastery of Bobbio in the province of Piacenza in Italy. Winfrid-Boniface was born in 672/673 near Exeter in England and migrated permanently to the continent in 718; in 719, and again in 732, he visited Rome and received from the pope the missionary mandate for today’s Germany. Equally active in these areas was Boniface’s compatriot Willibald (700–788), since 741 bishop of Eichstätt. Between 720 and 729, he had made a pilgrimage, which took him via Rome, Sicily, and Ephesus to Jerusalem and from there via Constantinople back to Italy. Thus, he linked Britain and the Frankish kingdom with the fixed points in the “mental maps” of Christianity as they had been established since the fourth century. Some decades later, the Frankish king Charlemagne (r. 768–814) followed these traces, when, like his contemporaries in Southeast Asia to the sites of Buddha, he sent emissaries and monks to Jerusalem.⁴³

40 Letsios, *Byzantio kai Erythra Thalassa*; Troupeau, “Kirchen und Christen,” 449–50.

41 Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*; Troupeau, “Kirchen und Christen,” 446–49; Bechhaus-Gerst, “Nubier”; Fauvelle, *Goldene Rhinozeros* 43–59.

42 Garsoïan, “Persien”; Greenwood, “Reassessment,” 131–86.

43 Riché, “Von Gregor”; McCormick, *Origins*, 129–34; McCormick, *Charlemagne’s Survey*; Borgolte, “Überblick,” 31–32; Lohse, “Asketen.”



Map 16. Important destinations in eastern Eurasia.
© Johannes Preiser-Kapeller.

In the wake of the Arab conquests, a vast sphere of religious expansion from the Iberian Peninsula to India and from Central Asia to the borders of Nubia was created. The new faith in these regions spread through both Muslim migration from the Arabian Peninsula and the conversion of native elites and populations, though such conversions were by no means particularly encouraged by the Arab authorities, since, as a result, taxes (such as the poll tax payable by non-Muslims) were lost, while the number of those who wanted to participate in the privileges of the conquerors increased. The consequent discrimination of neo-Muslims as clients (*mawali*) within the tribal system of the Arabs led to a series of uprisings and contributed to the overthrow of the Umayyad caliph by the 'Abbāsids in 750 (see above). Nevertheless, towards the end of the period under consideration, a process of accelerated conversion began in many of the core countries of the caliphate, making Muslims the majority over the course of rest of the Middle Ages.⁴⁴ Beyond the borders of the caliphate, heterodox communities (from the point of view of the Sunni majority) such as the Ibadis proved to be highly mobile. Founded in the middle of the eighth century, this repeatedly persecuted and often secretive community spread to the regions of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, where they acted as traders. In Oman they were able to found independent princedoms in the ninth century; from there, they expanded their trade networks into East Africa and the emerging port towns of the Swahili coast all the way to Mozambique, where they established germ cells of Muslim communities. An imamate of the Ibadis arose in 761 also on the western periphery of the caliphate in Tahert (Tiaret in today's Algeria), from where they traded through the Sahara with the wealthy kingdoms of West Africa and contributed to the emergence of Muslim communities there as well. A truly global phenomenon, the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca regularly brought together Muslims from all these areas.⁴⁵

The Arab-Islamic empire also united a large part of the Jewish communities from the Mediterranean to Iran into one political entity (with the largest concentration of Jewish population in Iraq); like the Christians, the Jews as "People of the Book" were allowed to practise their religion for an additional poll tax. In addition, like Christians, Manicheans, Zoroastrians, or Muslims, Jewish migration used the extensive networks in the caliphate and beyond, such as into Central Asia and India. Among the many inscriptions passing pilgrims and traders left behind on the rocks at the important pass of Shatial in the Karakorum in present-day Pakistan are also Hebrew texts from the seventh and eighth centuries. In Dandan Öiliq, near Hotan on the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert, letters were discovered in a ninth-century Judaeo-Persian idiom, and a Hebrew prayer from the same time further east in Dunhuang, on the entrance corridor to the Chinese heartland. Around 850, the Arab geographer Ibn Khuradādhbeh claims that Jewish traders also penetrated into the realm of the Tang, describing the enormous expansion of the networks of the "Rādhāniyya" (the meaning of this term is disputed) throughout Afro-Eurasia from the Frankish kingdom to China and from eastern Europe and Central

44 Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*.

45 Ricks, "Persian Gulf Seafaring"; Feldbauer, *Islamische Welt*, 105–21, 129–38; Wilkinson, *Ibāḍism*; Horton and Middleton, *Swahili*, 64–67; Ray, *Archaeology of Seafaring*, 286; Ptak, *Maritime Seidenstraße*, 126–29, 143–45; Porter, *Hajj*; Hawkes and Wynne-Jones, "India in Africa."

Asia to the coasts of the Indian Ocean. The activity described for these merchants of the Jewish faith along the routes north of the Black and Caspian seas probably formed one of the points of contact for the conversion of the qaghan and the elite of the Khazars to Judaism in the period around 800. The Khazars also invited Jewish scholars into their country and accepted Jewish refugees from the caliphate and the Byzantine empire. Nevertheless, Judaism in the Khazar qaghanate remained the belief of a minority of elites, and when the empire collapsed at the end of the tenth century, every vestige of Jewish life disappeared until the late medieval immigration of the Ashkenazim from Central Europe, where Jewish immigration had begun towards the end of the early medieval period.⁴⁶

Mercantile Mobility and Migration

As the cases of the Ibadis or the Jews demonstrate, religious identity formed one connecting factor of “trade diasporas” (see also Chapter 16). This term was coined by Abner Cohen and Philip D. Curtin in the sense of “communities of merchants living in interconnected networks among strangers.” Based on a common background (such as regional or ethnic origin or religious affiliation), such communities established extensive webs of exchange. This gave migrant merchants from these communities the opportunity to find points of contact for their businesses and to solve the problems of gathering information about commercial opportunities and establishing trust between business partners over relatively long distances and longer periods of time, as noted by Jonathan Skaff for the Sogdian case, for instance.⁴⁷

The core area of the Sogdians extended in the north of Iran between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) rivers. Sogdia was dominated by individual city-states such as Samarkand and Bukhara (now in Uzbekistan) and various principalities, whose elites competed with each other. The traders of the Sogdian cities profited from the central geographical position between the west and east of Eurasia. Even the oldest extant documents, the so-called “Ancient Sogdian Letters” from the period around 311, include the communication between a merchant in Dunhuang in the middle of the route between Sogdia and China and his business partner in Samarkand, as well as in China proper.⁴⁸ In the seventh century, the Sogdians were able to profit at first from the collapse of the Sasanian empire, especially since the advancing Arabs could not reach a permanent expansion beyond the Oxus until the beginning of the eighth century.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 96–98; Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia*, 55–56, 78–80; Power, *Red Sea*, 27–28, 42; Silverstein, “Markets to Marvels”; Toch, “Jews in Europe”; Toch, “Juden.”

⁴⁷ Curtin, *Cross-cultural Trade*; Greif, *Institutions*; Seland, “Networks and Social Cohesion,” 373–77; Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” 1–19; Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, 9; Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions*; Cohen, *Global Diasporas*; Skaff, “Sogdian Trade Diaspora,” 510, 513.

⁴⁸ Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 43–50; Comparetti, *Samarcanda centro del mondo*, 17–35; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 117–21; Skaff, “Sogdian Trade Diaspora,” 508–9; Livshits, “Ancient Letters”; Rezakhani, *Reorienting the Sasanians*, 147–56, 176–82; Wertmann, *Sogdians in China*, 22–23.

⁴⁹ Hansen, *Silk Road*, 94–96; Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 173.

On the eastern flank from 630 onwards, the Tang empire became the dominant force in the steppes, placing all important cities along the main trade routes under its control, including the large Sogdian communities in those locations. In Sogdia itself, however, Chinese supremacy remained largely nominal. But, like in the empires of the Hephthalites and the Türks, Sogdians took advantage of the opportunities offered by this vast united Tang empire and established themselves in even greater numbers in many cities from Central Asia to deep into the provinces of northern China. They also served as generals and administrators (see above), but especially as merchants and craftsmen, supplying the “cosmopolitan” elite of the Tang empire with “exotic” goods from the west, and mass commodities such as tens of thousands of horses from the steppe for the imperial armies. They were subordinate to their own elected headmen (*sabao*, who were acknowledged by the Chinese authorities), applied their own laws within their community, and were allowed to cultivate places of worship for the various religions they practised, including Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Christianity.⁵⁰ However, in the course of the Chinese fighting against the insurgent general An Lushan, who was of Sogdian-Turkic origin, and his followers in the years 755 to 763, other Sogdians were suspected of collaborating with their “compatriot” and fell victim to attacks and even massacres. Many of the survivors now sought to hide their non-Chinese heritage, accelerating processes of “Sinification.”⁵¹ The loss of Chinese control in Central Asia also reduced profits for the Sogdian communities of merchants. However, new opportunities arose through cooperation with the Uyghurs, who emerged from the An Lushan rebellion as the most significant power in the steppes north of China and provided both important military support and horse supplies for the weakened Tang regime. In return, they received large quantities of silk and other goods as a gift or tribute from China. Sogdians again served as middlemen for a steppe kingdom; the Khan and the Uyghur elite also converted to Manichaeism, which had spread from Iran with the Sogdians. Nevertheless, as the Uyghurs never managed to achieve a similar level of control over the east-west routes as the Tang, the contacts between the Sogdians in China and their homeland became increasingly weak. Moreover, when the Uyghur qaghanate collapsed after 840, this last golden age of Sogdian activity in China’s economy ended.⁵² In Sogdia itself, between 705 and 715, the Arabs established their permanent rule. The conquerors had an interest in the maintenance of the trade; also, some Sogdian groups were ready to come to terms with the new regime and to explore the possibilities of mercantile expansion that resulted from its incorporation into the vast Arab-Islamic empire. In the eighth and ninth

50 Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 119–210; Comparetti, *Samarcanda centro del mondo*, 37–41; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 82, 143–57; Skaff, “Sogdian Trade Diaspora”; Baumer, *Frühes Christentum*, 227–43; Lewis, *China between Empires*, 165–67; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 147–53, 157–72; Kordoses, “T’ang China,” 200–4; Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 58–70; Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 241–71.

51 Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 215–20; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 107–11, 157–60; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 157–58.

52 Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 223–25, 261, 303–22; Wang, *Multipolar Asia*, 45–54, 138–90; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 185–87; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 170–71; Thilo, *Chang’an*, 260–80; Paul, *Weltgeschichte*, 133–38.

centuries, Sogdian traders could be found in Iran and Iraq, and some even reached the Persian Gulf and Oman. But most often they were now in a position that was secondary to the Arab and Persian merchants: the caliphate did not open up the same opportunities for the spread of Sogdian trade as the Tang empire did. Under the Tang, the Sogdians were also able to maintain their various religious affiliations, while full integration into the elites of the caliphate required the conversion to Islam. Some members of the Sogdian aristocracy chose this option (see above), while others hoped to shake off Arab rule with foreign aid, such as from the Tang, but to no avail. This failure encouraged the Iranization and Islamization of the region, which led to the disappearance of the Sogdian language and other cultural features in the tenth and eleventh centuries. After more than 700 years, the great period of the Sogdian “trade diaspora” ended.⁵³

While political turmoil and warfare made it harder to use the trade routes from China’s centres to Central Asia from the middle of the eighth century onwards, trade flourished in the demographic and economically increasingly important southern provinces (which profited from a constant migration from the north),⁵⁴ and from there overseas. An essential role in the exchange of goods between north and south played the vast canal network created under the Sui and early Tang; at the crossroads between the Great Canal and the Yangtze river, Yangzhou experienced a veritable boom in the eighth century, attracting traders and artisans from all over China and Asia. By 750, the city may have hosted some 500,000 people, including permanent settlements of several thousands of foreign traders such as Koreans, Japanese, Arabs, and Persians. However, the latter became victims of massacres when, in 760, during the time of crisis following the An Lushan uprising, rebel troops captured and plundered the city. Yet Yangzhou was able to recover from this blow and continued to function as a trading centre until the turmoil of the 870s and 880s that was associated with the final decline of the Tang brought further devastation. In the middle of the tenth century, the city was finally destroyed.⁵⁵ A similar fate befell Guangzhou/Canton, the most important southern Chinese port city. There, the share of foreign traders in the population of perhaps 200,000 people was even greater, especially from Southeast Asia, India, and the Islamic world. The coexistence of these different groups and their relations with the Chinese authorities did not always go smoothly. After the governor Lu Yüan-jui ransacked a merchant ship from Southeast Asia in 684, he was assassinated by its captain. In 758, the Arabs and Persians in Guangzhou took advantage of the weakening of the Tang government by the An Lushan rebellion to drive out another unpopular governor; afterward, they plundered the city and fled on their ships across the sea. The trading centre then lost much of its attractiveness for almost fifty years before foreign merchants were allowed to return in large numbers

53 Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 265–90; Comparetti, *Samarcanda centro del mondo*, 41–51; Paul, *Weltgeschichte*, 82–87; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 129–38; Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, 244–54.

54 Between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, the demographic centre of gravity moved from the north to the south of China, cf. Schottenhammer, “China,” 57.

55 Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 169–70; Ptak, *Maritime Seidenstraße*, 113–14; Schottenhammer, *China’s Emergence*.

from 792 onwards. In 836, governor Lu Chun was even induced to issue bans on intermarriage with Chinese and the acquisition of property by foreigners. Reportedly as many as 120,000 of these “foreigners,” including Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, were murdered when Guangzhou was captured in 879 by the Huang Chao rebels; some of the survivors reportedly found refuge in Southeast Asia. The city did not recover from this massacre until the end of the Tang dynasty (904/907 CE); according to Arabic author Abu Zayd al-Sīrāfī (ca. 900 CE), due to the troubled situation in China, trips from the Persian Gulf to this country were discontinued. As overseas trade began to flourish again in the tenth century, Guangzhou was replaced by Quanzhou (Zaytoun) in Fujian province as the primary maritime centre.⁵⁶

Before that time, as Abu Zayd al-Sīrāfī describes, the port of departure for all ships from the Persian Gulf that wanted to travel to China was the city of Siraf on the Iranian coast. The route led from there to Muscat in Oman and then across the open sea to Kollam in southwestern India; from there to Malaysia and through the Straits of Malaka to Sumatra and today’s Vietnam and finally to southern China. This journey took at least 120 days. Due to the long travel times, permanent merchant communities emerged in various ports along the route. Siraf also served as a hub for the important city of Shiraz in the interior from which many merchants operated their branches in the port city.⁵⁷ Along the coasts of East Africa, the merchants from Siraf and Shiraz similar to the merchants of the Ibadi sect from Oman were active all the way to present-day Tanzania and Mozambique. From East Africa there also existed connections to India, where the important harbour of Daybul in the Indus delta (now Pakistan) is mentioned as the place of origin of early Muslim communities (*waDebuli*) settling at the Swahili coast.⁵⁸

In India, guilds of migrant merchants became an important factor of power for the rulers, acting as financiers for construction projects and other undertakings. In return, they were granted a high level of self-government, the immunity from certain interventions of the rulers, and even the maintenance of their own mercenary troops to protect their trade routes and settlements. According to Hermann Kulke, the most powerful of these guilds became “almost a state in the state,” like the Ayyavolu that existed since the eighth century and had their origins in the capital Aihole of the Chalukya

56 Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 14–16, 22–24; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 169–70; al-Sīrāfī, *Aḳḥbār al-Šīn wa ’l-Hind*, 67–71; Feldbauer, *Islamische Welt*, 106–8; Schottenhammer, *China’s Emergence*; Schottenhammer “China,” 63.

57 Lombard, *Blütezeit des Islam*, 131–34; Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*; Feldbauer, *Islamische Welt*, 105–10; Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia*; Ricks, “Persian Gulf Seafaring,” 351; Seland, “Archaeology of Trade,” 382; al-Sīrāfī, *Aḳḥbār al-Šīn wa ’l-Hind*, 30–35; Power, *Red Sea*; Priestmann, *Quantitative Archaeological Analysis*, 18–25, 145–55, 327–35, 420; Ray, “Trading Partners,” 292–94; Morony, “Trade and Exchange.”

58 Hawkes and Wynne-Jones, “India in Africa,” 19–29; Fauvelle, *Goldene Rhinoceros*, 40–42, 162–70; Ray, *Archaeology of Seafaring*, 200–1, 280; Watson, *Agricultural Innovation*, 77–81, 91–98; al-Sīrāfī, *Aḳḥbār al-Šīn wa ’l-Hind*, 121–23; Priestmann, *Quantitative Archaeological Analysis*, 52–54, 232–33, 357–59; Feldbauer, *Islamische Welt*, 109–10; Ptak, *Maritime Seidenstraße*, 143–45; Prendergast et al., “Asian Faunal Introductions”; Horton et al., “Fatimid Rock Crystal.”

empire in western central India. From there, the Ayyavolu maintained close relations not only with neighbouring kingdoms but also with the other riparian regions of the western Indian Ocean in the Persian Gulf, in Arabia and up to East Africa and Egypt, from where, in turn, traders came to the west Indian coast. Its eastern counterpart was the no less influential Manigramam guild, which since the ninth century connected long-distance traders from Tamil Nadu in southeastern India. They acted mainly in the direction of Southeast Asia; later, their activities also extended to Quanzhou (Zaytun) in southern China, where an Indian “colony” emerged. Finally, no later than the eleventh century, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish merchants coming from the west, such as those mentioned in the documents of the Geniza in Cairo, founded their own guild (Ánjuvannam) on the southwestern Kerala coast.⁵⁹

The weakening of the ‘Abbāsīd regime in Iraq from the late ninth century onwards (see above) contributed to a shift in the focus of maritime long-distance trade routes to the Red Sea in the tenth century.⁶⁰ A similar shift in the main axis of trade occurred because of the decline of the ‘Abbāsīds on the northern flank of the caliphate, from the hitherto dominant Caucasus–Baghdad route to an eastern route from Khwarezm (south of Lake Aral) to the upper Volga. From the eighth century onwards, merchants and settlers from Scandinavia (the Varangians or “Rus”), via the eastern European rivers, established connections from the Islamic world to the Baltic Sea and northern and western Europe; in these areas, conquerors, settlers, and merchants from Scandinavia (“Vikings”) became equally more and more important players, especially on the British Isles.⁶¹ The trade routes between the emerging states of West Africa such as Ghana and Gao at the Niger or Kanem on Lake Chad and the cities of Islamic North Africa, such as Sijilmasa in southeast Morocco, also became increasingly important as routes for precious metal, especially gold. As in East Africa, Ibadi migrant communities played an important role in the intensification of trans-Saharan trade.⁶² Thus, mercantile mobility and migration connected the western European and the western African peripheries of the early medieval world system with the core regions around the Indian Ocean.

59 Ray, *Archaeology of Seafaring*, 192–97, 223–24, 235–36, 283–85; Singh, *Early Medieval India*, 403–8, 497–504, 584–90, 597–600; Kulke and Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens*, 113–20, 128–31, 160–64; Karashima, *South India*, 139–43; Ray, “Trading Partners,” 287–301.

60 Power, *Red Sea*, 86–89, 103–4, 109–12; Power, “Abbasid Indian Ocean”; Cooper, *Medieval Nile*, 230–51.

61 Noonan, “Some Observations”; Curta, “Markets”; Lombard, *Blütezeit des Islam*, 230–32; Gonneau/Lavrov, *Rhôs á la Russie*, 80–86; Jesch, *Viking Diaspora*, 28–30; Scheller, “Wikinger und Normannen.”

62 Lombard, *Blütezeit des Islam*, 73–74, 214–15, 224–26; Feldbauer, *Islamische Welt*, 129–38; Schörle, “Saharan Trade”; Messier/Miller, *Last Civilized Place*, 22–24, 64–80; Green, *Long Way from Home*; Green, *Trans-Saharan Contacts*; Boivin, “Proto-Globalisation,” 377–78; Bechhaus-Gerst, “Nubier,” 114–15.

Refugees, Deportees, and Slaves

The destinies of mobile groups considered so far demonstrated how often the interests and conflicts of the great empires repeatedly and forcibly influenced the lives of people. But in addition to all varieties of coercion and persecution, there was always a personal drive, the search for better or at least more bearable living conditions. This even holds true for refugees and deportees, since they had a residual amount of room for manoeuvre in the negotiation processes with new authorities. From Armenian sources, we learn for instance how conditions of the reception and settlement of 12,000 Armenian refugees in the Byzantine empire in 788 were the subject of prior negotiations between the leaders of the refugees and the emperor, who willingly accepted people into his empire whose demographic base had been weakened by plague epidemics and wars. The refugees were then settled in specific regions due to the plans of the imperial regime.⁶³ In general, the transfer of population from one end of their empire to the other was often practised by the Byzantines. Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602) in 602 planned the relocation of no fewer than 30,000 families from Armenia to Thrace, but the plan was not implemented due to the murder of the emperor in the same year. In the 750s, however, thousands of Armenian and Syrian families were transferred to the Balkan Peninsula, after the troops of Emperor Constantine V (r. 741–775) had captured them or “motivated” to move around the cities of Theodosiupolis (Erzurum) and Melitene (near today’s Malatya in southeastern Turkey) during campaigns against the Arabs. Thousands of Slavs (allegedly more than 200,000 people) captured on the Byzantine Balkan borders were in turn deported to Asia Minor; from there, however, some decided to desert after negotiations with the Arabs. One of the aims of such a policy, namely the securing of loyalty through the transplantation into a new and foreign home, did not work out in this case.⁶⁴ The receiving Arab authorities in turn resettled the newcomers according to their own strategic plans; this was also done with population from within the empire’s borders. Shortly after gaining control of the southern Caucasus in 700, reportedly 24,000 Arabs from Syria were settled in and around Derbent, and another garrison was established in Dariali, both important passageways across the Caucasus. The recruitment of the troops in Dariali from non-native populations has recently been proven with isotope studies of bones in the cemetery south of the fortress already for the early eighth century.⁶⁵

There was also a long tradition in China of resettling population to strengthen the resource base (of workers and taxpayers) in certain regions. The Sui and Tang emperors continued these practices in the seventh to ninth centuries for the foundation of their capitals in Chang’an and Luoyang, and also in newly conquered territories. After the victory over the Korean kingdom Koguryo in 668, more than 200,000 people were deported from there and settled predominantly in and around Chang’an; some of these deportees

⁶³ Preiser-Kapeller, “Bosporus zum Ararat”; Pahlitzsch, “Byzanz,” 98–99.

⁶⁴ Greenwood, “Armenian Neighbours,” 337–38; Ditten, *Ethnische Verschiebungen*; Pahlitzsch, “Byzanz,” 95–96.

⁶⁵ Alizadeh, “Borderland Projects,” 254–88; Sauer et al., *Persia’s Imperial Power*; Sauer et al., “Northern Outpost”; Preiser-Kapeller, “Complex Processes”; Kristó-Nagy, “Conflict and Cooperation.”

and their descendants then made quite a career in the empire of the Tang, including Ko Sonji, the commander of the Chinese army in the Battle of Talas in 751 against the Arabs. The end of the Tang rule was also accompanied by a large population movement when in 904 Chang'an was officially declared to be dissolved and the remaining inhabitants were relocated to Luoyang.⁶⁶

Entirely subjected to mobility due to external will were slaves, who in the early medieval period were to be found in all societies under different designations and legal forms. On the general parameters of this status, agreement existed so that cross-border trade was also possible on a larger scale. We lack, however, sources for the (potentially devastating) impact that slave-raiding had on the communities from which captive labour was taken at large—beyond occasional narratives on more “prominent” slaves in hagiography, for instance.⁶⁷ Within the borders of the Chinese empire, non-Chinese populations of the south such as the Thai were one of the main sources of slaves. (Many eunuchs also came from these regions to the imperial court; see below.) However, when, in 817, the “slave hunt” became too intensive in these areas, the governor of Guangzhou (Canton) issued orders against the sale of women who had been deported from their birthplaces (a rare hint on the effect of slave-raiding on the communities of origin). From overseas, slaves came from Southeast Asia and Korea to China, some of whom were the victims of pirate attacks. The arrival of slaves of dark skin colour from Java, who were referred to as “Zangi/Zanj” as in the Arab world (see below), caused a particular sensation; it is difficult to decide whether some of them originally came from East Africa, as in the caliphate. Some of these slaves were diplomatic gifts to the Tang emperors; slaves from India and from various regions of Central Asia arrived at their court, as well as Ainu (members of the indigenous population) from Japan, who received admiration in 659 because of their long beards. Such “exotic” slaves also increased the prestige of their owner.⁶⁸

In western Afro-Eurasia, Slavic-speaking groups from eastern and southeastern Europe became an important “source” of unfree labour from the seventh century onwards. Latin texts called these groups *slavi*, Greek ones *sklaviniai*, and Arabic authors *saqaliba*; from this, the modern word “slave” most likely derives. The then largely non-Christianized (or Islamized) Slavs settled in smaller communities and became the victims of military campaigns and slave hunts from the Frankish kingdom, from the Italian maritime cities, from the Bulgarian empire, from Byzantium, from the Vikings and the Khazars, but also from competing Slavic neighbours who sold prisoners to traders from these realms. In 694–695, there was even a state-organized sale of thousands of Slavic prisoners of war in many Byzantine provinces in Asia Minor, presumably the “loot” from the previous campaigns of Emperor Justinian II on the Balkan Peninsula. But the most important customers for the *saqaliba* were the courts and lands of the Islamic world, especially for “special slaves” such as eunuchs—coming from “castration centres” as in

⁶⁶ Lewis, *China between Empires*, 77–79, 114–16; Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 154; Glahn, *Economic History*, 96–97, 170–75.

⁶⁷ Smith, “Trade and Commerce,” 236–37; Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery*, 30–35, 105–20; Schiel, “Sklaven.”

⁶⁸ Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 43–50; Thilo, *Chang'an*, 91–98; Bielenstein, *Six Dynasties*, 82–83, 104.

Verdun in the Frankish kingdom or Derbent on the Caspian Sea—or warriors—mamlūks, many of them were also Türks from Central Asia (see above). Trade routes ran north to south: in the west from the Frankish kingdom and Italy to Spain and North Africa; in the eastern Mediterranean from the Balkans to Egypt and Syria; in the Caucasus from the Khazar empire to Armenia and Iraq; and across Central Asia from eastern Europe to eastern Iran and to Iraq. Christians, Jews (such as the abovementioned al-Rādhāniyya), Muslims, and “pagans” participated equally in this trade, which over the centuries probably “mobilized” tens of thousands of people against their will over long distances, given the number of Arab silver coins partly traded in return for slaves to eastern and northern Europe.⁶⁹

Another main source of slaves for the Islamic world was Africa; from Aksum slaves arrived already in pre-Islamic times on the Arabian Peninsula. Some are even mentioned among the first followers of the Prophet Muhammad. Nevertheless, after the expansion of the caliphate, the coasts of Aksum became one of the target areas of large-scale slave hunts. Similarly, the treaty signed by the Arab governor of Egypt in 652 with the king of Makuria in Nubia (now Sudan) provided for an annual tribute of 355 slaves. Later on, slaves became a commodity of trade with the growing port cities at the coasts of East Africa. The dark-skinned slaves from different parts of Africa were called *Zanj* in the Arabic sources; the origin of the term is unclear. In various texts, they are described as esteemed workers, especially in agriculture, but also characterized with “racist” prejudice. On the other hand, some received a special education, such as in Medina, where singers, musicians, and dancers were instructed, some also coming from the Slavic world or India.⁷⁰ The growing number of *Zanj* can be derived from their mobilization in the context of various uprisings from the later seventh century onwards. In the ninth century, many slaves from Africa worked in southern Iraq and neighbouring Khuzestan (now southwest Iran) in agriculture, especially on sugar-cane plantations or in the drainage of larger wetlands. But these swamps also served as a refuge for rebels, robbers, and religious deviants, and from this combination emerged a major uprising of the *Zanj*, who even established their own state under the leadership of the self-declared caliph Ali ibn Muhammad in 869–883, contributing to the further destabilization of ‘Abbāsīd rule.⁷¹

The abovementioned eunuchs were in a special position between slavery and possible elite status; since late antiquity, they played an increasing role at the Roman/Byzantine court in Constantinople, for instance. Many came from beyond the empire’s border—we hear about Caucasian areas such Armenia and Abasgia, but also about Arabia, Persia, or (again) the Slavic world as regions of origin—since the emperors legislated against the

69 Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery*, 59–76; Jankowiak, *Dirhams for Slaves*; McCormick, “New Light”; Lombard, *Blütezeit des Islam*, 198–202; Paul, *Weltgeschichte*, 175–76; Hardt, “Slawen,” 177–80; Schiel, “Sklaven,” 255–56.

70 Popovic, *Revolt*, 14–22; Power, *Red Sea*, 92–95, 141–43; Heers, *Les Négriers*, 27–33; Lombard, *Blütezeit des Islam*, 202–4; Bechhaus-Gerst, “Nubier,” 110–11; Schiel, “Sklaven,” 253–55.

71 Popovic, *Revolt*, 22–23, 33–43; Heers, *Les Négriers*, 231–40; Lombard, *Blütezeit des Islam*, 33–34, 160–62.

castration of their own subjects. Nevertheless, parents in Roman provinces (we hear about Paphlagonia, for instance) had their children turned into eunuchs due to the career perspectives at the court. There, eunuchs not only served in the private quarters of the emperor and the empress—such as the *parakoimomenos* Damianos, of Slav origin, under Emperor Michael III between 842 and 867, who even founded a monastery—but were also entrusted with high functions in the civil administration or even the military—such as the Armenian Manuel, who commanded an attack on Alexandria in Egypt in 645.⁷² Eunuchs in the Tang empire came, for the most part, from southern China, where slaves were captured among the non-Han Chinese populations and then emasculated. Equally, the annual tributes from these areas to the north, which were termed the “breeding grounds of eunuchs,” included castrated young slaves. Yang Fuguang (842–883 CE), for instance, who was also successful as a general, was born in the Min region of today’s Fujian. During his lifetime, the power of the approximately 3,000–5,000 eunuchs at the court had grown considerably compared to the early Tang period. Although various factions often competed for influence, they also exercised more and more important functions, including command of the palace guard. From the 840s onwards, they often became decisive in the selection of emperors from the Tang family. Only when General Zhu Quanzhong occupied Chang’an in 903 and killed hundreds of eunuchs in the palace was their power broken. However, this event also marked the beginning of the end of the Tang dynasty, which was deposed in 907.⁷³

Migrations on and under the Radar of Historians

Even a limited look at forced or self-initiated migration such as the one in this chapter provides a window into the abundance of cross-cultural lifestyles that this mobility created. Yet many extensive population movements remained below the radar of state authorities or the interest of official historiography. As an example may serve the migration movements over thousands of kilometres of nomadic groups, who appear in varying combinations and different names in the writing of neighbouring empires, such as the Chinese, then disappear from them and eventually reappeared in new composition and with new naming in Roman historiography. The exact connection between these peoples, such between the Xiongnu and the Huns in the fourth century, between the Rouran and the Avars in the sixth century, or also the prehistory of the Magyars before they show up in Byzantine and Latin sources in the late ninth century, remain unclear. New findings about the geographical and demographic extent of such migrations result from methods of genetic history. For example, the spread of the Y-DNA haplo group J1/M 267 from the Atlantic to Central Asia had been interpreted as a marker of Arab emigration as a result of the caliphate’s conquests. However, genetic features say little about the actual perceptions of the identity of such groups.⁷⁴ At the same time, we rarely

⁷² Tougher, *Eunuch*.

⁷³ Peterson, “Court and Province”; Thilo, “Chang’an,” 20–28.

⁷⁴ Khazanov, “Pastoral Nomadic Migrations”; Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire*; Paul, *Weltgeschichte*, 71–78; Manco, *Ancestral Journeys*, 84–86; Feuchter, *Herausforderung der Geschichtswissenschaft*;

possess “ego-documents” from the mobile groups of the steppe, for instance, and depend on the perspective of the neighbouring sedentary historiographies. There, mobility (and also flexibility with regard to the change of the overlord) could be interpreted as a sign of the notorious unreliability that served as a centrepiece in the discourses on the “barbarians.” In Chinese narratives of the Tang era (often called a cosmopolitan one), the esteemed warlike quality of the foreign generals could turn into brutality, coupled with other (traditional) stereotypes about the “cunning and tricky, deceitful and deceptive” barbarians from the steppes and Central Asia. With long noses, deep-set eyes, full beards, curly hair, and exotic costumes, the strangeness of these newcomers was also emphasized in their visual depictions.⁷⁵ Byzantine authors, in turn, used the term “Armenian” as an indication of a foreign as well as a heretic origin, with a clear pejorative undertone, as in the case of Emperor Leon V (r. 813–820), called “the Armenian” and “the Amalekite.” Leon took the throne after a successful military career; on the coronation of his oldest son Symbatios (Armenian “Smbat”) as co-emperor, he had him renamed Constantine. Despite his efforts to accommodate native elites by modifying too obvious signs of foreign identity, Leon received lasting not only bad press in Byzantine historiography but also the aforementioned barbarian nicknames, labelling him as an outsider.⁷⁶ Similarly, Byzantine texts describe the horrors of the barbarian hordes of “Hagarens, Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Iberians, Zekhs, and Kabirs,” as well as of the “Slavs, Huns, Vandals, Getes, Manicheans, Laz and Alans”; these made up the supporters of another candidate of foreign origin for the imperial throne, Thomas called “the Slav,” in the 820s.⁷⁷ At the same time, Syrian authors complain about the “locust swarms of the Alans, Khazars, and the people of Kufa, the Ethiopians, Medes, Persians and Türk” among the ‘Abbāsīd troops.⁷⁸ The colourful network of elites and followers is interpreted here as a proof of the aberration of those who used these strangers from the (culturally, linguistically, religiously or ethnically defined) traditions of the ancestors. Imperial claims of worldwide domination, however, and also long-distance trade were not possible in the vast spaces between the Mediterranean and East Asia without these networks of migrants.⁷⁹ The exchange of people, objects, and ideas between imperial centres equally contributed to the emergence of a kind of common language of images and ceremonies across Afro-Eurasia in the fifth to ninth centuries, manifested in aspects of material culture (iconography, costumes, and other markers of distinction such as

Schmieder, “Steppenvölker.” Cf. also Borgolte, “Überblick,” 23–24, for further examples of “hidden migrations” such as the one of Bantu-speaking groups in sub-Saharan Africa (see also Bechhaus-Gerst, “Nubier,” 111–12).

75 Abramson, *Ethnic Identity*, xviii–xx, 21–51; Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*, 52–60; Hansen, *Silk Road*, 196, 235–37; Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 28–32; Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire*, 164–72 (also for the term “cosmopolitan”).

76 Turner, “Origins and Accession,” 171–203.

77 Codoñer, *Emperor Theophilos*, 41, 45–52.

78 Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 74; Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, 165.

79 Preiser-Kapeller, *Jenseits von Rom*, 83–101.

belts, swords, and banners) and of noble lifestyle, such as hunting or the game of polo (which spread from Persia to Constantinople in the west and Chang'an in the east). This "aristocratic koine" in turn facilitated the mobility of elites between imperial spheres.⁸⁰

At the same time, the effects of these connections extended beyond the circle of elites; they changed not only religious beliefs (as demonstrated above) but also agrarian practices and culinary preferences, both at the core of the daily life of the vast majority of people. Some of these effects emerged again from elite demands, such as for silk (the production of which migrated from China to Central Asia and finally to the Mediterranean in the fifth and sixth centuries), but, in turn, integrated wider circles of populations in the cultivation and production of these commodities. The migration of crops and technologies between southern and northern China after their "reunification" in the late sixth century and between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean before and especially after the Arab expansion of the seventh century, contributed to what have been called "agricultural revolutions" and resulted in the large-scale cultivation, consumption, and trade of rice, sugar cane, tea, cotton, and oranges. The increased prominence of these ingredients in medieval Arabic cookbooks in comparison with ancient Roman ones (especially Apicius) bears witness to the more tangible and often underestimated long-term effects of early medieval migrations.⁸¹

And far beyond the great empires, finally, the most extensive and daring migrations of those centuries (also in comparison to the Vikings' advance to Greenland and North America around the turn of the first millennium CE) were undertaken: the migrations of Austronesian groups shipping over thousands of miles of open sea on the Pacific Ocean. Around 1000 BCE, they had arrived in New Guinea and during the following centuries advanced from island after island to the east to the extreme edges of Oceania. Probably between the second and ninth century, they reached Hawaii from the Marquesas Islands over a distance of more than 3,800 kilometres; a second settlement wave came from Tahiti, more than 4,400 kilometres away, in the eleventh century. Perhaps also from the Marquesas, settlers arrived in the fifth or sixth century on the Easter Island, 3,800 kilometres to the southeast. A western spur of these migrations reached, perhaps from Borneo, the island of Madagascar between 200 and 500 CE, and rode over a distance of more than 7,000 km from Southeast Asia to East Africa.⁸² They illustrate the actual global dimension of migration in the Early Middle Ages.

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⁸⁰ Skaff, *Sui-Tang China*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Jenseits von Rom*, 63–66.

⁸¹ Watson, *Agricultural Innovation*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Jenseits von Rom*, 193–220.

⁸² Adelaar and Himmelmann, *Austronesian Languages*; Oliver, *Polynesia*; Ptak, *Maritime Seidenstraße*, 62–64; Borgolte, "Überblick," 22–23; Bechhaus-Gerst, "Nubier," 113–14.

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Chapter 18

CLIMATE AND DISEASE

Peter Sarris

Just as the progress of a disease shows a doctor the secret life of a body, so to the historian the progress of a great calamity yields valuable information about the nature of the society so stricken.¹

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances.²

Introduction

In the past twenty years, historians, archaeologists, and scientists have become increasingly aware of the extent to which the first half of the sixth century would appear to have witnessed a period of major climatic instability which would serve to transform the conditions in which societies across the northern hemisphere operated. The effects of such climate change in the 530s would soon be compounded by a (probably connected) series of outbreaks of epidemic disease, which would recur until the middle decades of the eighth century. Across much of Eurasia in particular, therefore, but also including Arabia and parts of Africa, the Early Middle Ages would be characterized by a specific set of climatic and epidemiological circumstances. The impact of both climate change and disease would be most dramatically felt by the first generations to encounter them: it is therefore the voices of authors from the sixth and seventh centuries that will predominate in what follows. Thereafter, societies increasingly developed coping mechanisms (both organizational and psychological), and men and women bedded down into a dogged routine of survival, which has left less of a trace in the written sources on which we primarily rely. Only in the second half of the eighth century would the general dissipation of the late antique waves of epidemic disease finally facilitate an era of renewed efflorescence and growth.

The City of the Three Pyramids

At the start of the sixth century, the city of Teotihuacan, the spectacular ruins of which still stand in the Valley of Mexico some 40 kilometres to the northeast of Mexico City, was perhaps the greatest urban conurbation in the western hemisphere. With an urban

¹ Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I.52.

² Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, 1.

footprint of some 22 to 25 square kilometres, and a population estimated at some 100,000 to 150,000 inhabitants, it was comparable in scale to contemporary Rome or Alexandria, while its three magnificent pyramidal temple complexes—dedicated to the Sun, the Moon, and the Feathered Serpent—were, it has been noted, of similar monumentality to those of Old Kingdom Egypt.³ To later generations of Aztecs, Teotihuacan would be mythologized as a primordial abode of giants, where the gods had created the world.⁴ At some point in the late sixth century, however, Teotihuacan appears to have undergone a devastating political and demographic collapse, although (again, like sixth-century Rome) it would continue to serve as a centre of religious and political significance, and, for the next couple of centuries, would continue to support a not insignificant population estimated at “some tens of thousands.”⁵

The sixth-century collapse of Teotihuacan was clearly associated with considerable violence, perhaps indicative of an explosion of social, political, or religious tensions. As two recent commentators have remarked, “most notable is the intense burning and iconoclasm registered in the urban centre ... the destruction included the systematic burning of temple and palace complexes, the smashing of statuary, and the excavation of burial and cache deposits.”⁶ Other analyses have emphasized the disruptive effects of sudden, large-scale population movements, and evidence for dramatic climatic instability associated with a major volcanic eruption, probably to be associated with a catastrophic episode evident from the archaeological and geological evidence from Ilopango in El Salvador.⁷ The challenge faced by scholars of the transition to the “Epiclassic” period of Mesoamerican history (of ca. 650–950 CE) is how to triangulate between these three putative causes of collapse and decline, each of which were conceivably interrelated, and resist the temptation to fall back on monocausal reductionism.

Certainly, the evidence for the Ilopango eruption is compelling. The event deposited a major layer of white volcanic ash, referred to by locals as the “white earth” (*tierra blanca*).⁸ These deposits, amounting to some 84 cubic kilometres of uncompacted silicic tephra, have been subjected to increasingly sophisticated radiocarbon dating, revealing one eruption ca. 150–370 CE, and another ca. 408–536 CE, with the evidence “having recently tipped strongly in favour of recent versus older ages as new radiocarbon dates have emerged, and it has even been suggested the eruption was responsible for a major sulphuric acid aerosol veil in the stratosphere reportedly observed in 536 CE.”⁹ The polyclastic currents resultant from the (probably) sixth-century eruption can be seen to have travelled at least 45 kilometres, and “must have devastated low-lying agricultural areas and settlements.”¹⁰ The subsequent ash-cloud fallout, moreover, “blanketed an area

3 Carballo and Robb, “Lighting the World,” 12; Ward-Perkins. “The Cities.”

4 Carballo and Robb, “Lighting the World,” 13; Boone, “Venerable Place.”

5 Carballo and Robb, “Lighting the World,” 17–18.

6 Carballo and Robb, “Lighting the World,” 18.

7 Carballo and Robb, “Lighting the World,” 18.

8 Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 248.

9 Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 248.

10 Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 249.

of at least 10,000 square kilometres waist-deep in pumice and ash.” “Far less than this,” it has been noted, “is sufficient to shut down traditional agricultural practices for decades,” and, amid much human misery, “the landscape of western, central, and eastern Salvador must have been transformed into a denuded and sterile mosaic of dustbowl and mud bath.”¹¹ In the southeast Mayan highlands, the important religious and trading centre of Chalchuapa (some 77 kilometres from Ilopango) was buried knee-deep in tephra deposits and appears to have essentially been abandoned.¹² Depopulation and abandonment of sites is also discernible on the Pacific slope and southeast coast of Guatemala, where a possible breakdown in the food supply may have led to around a third of the population of the city of Kaminaljuyú (which lies beneath modern-day Guatemala City) fleeing the site.¹³ There is clear evidence, in short, for a collapse in the economy and society of the southern Mayan territories.

Revealingly, however, the neighbouring power of Teotihuacan, which was connected to these territories through a series of trade routes, would appear to have initially taken advantage of the southern Mayan collapse to extend its sphere of direct authority and control, drawing the major obsidian sources in the Mayan highlands into its embrace, before seemingly losing control of the social, economic, and cultural tensions resulting from the era of major destabilization from which its elite had initially sought to profit.¹⁴ The relationship between the Ilopango eruption and the demise of Teotihuacan would thus appear to have been far from unilinear, and was heavily mediated by social, economic, and demographic factors.¹⁵

“A Most Dread Portent”

The Ilopango eruption and its aftermath is potentially of particular significance to the study of the global Early Middle Ages, however, in that the aerosol veil in the stratosphere with which climate-change scientists have increasingly associated it would arguably be observed across the northern hemisphere well beyond the geographical confines of Mesoamerica. Furthermore, through obscuring sunlight, it may even have heralded or intensified a “Late Antique Little Ice Age” discernible from study of “ice cores, tree rings, ocean sediments, lake varves, and mineral deposits in caves, known as speleothems.”¹⁶ Such evidence would suggest, in particular, that “the 530s and 540s were not just frosty. They were the coldest decades in the late Holocene” and that “the 530s and 540s stand out against the entire late Holocene as a moment of unparalleled volcanic violence” in

11 Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 249.

12 Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 249.

13 Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 250.

14 Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 250–51.

15 See Keys, *Catastrophe*, 209.

16 Harper, *Fate of Rome*, 44–45; and Izdebski, *Rural Economy* (who provides a fascinating overview of the scientific evidence for climate change and landscape use in Byzantium).

which the Ilopango eruption seems to have played an important part.¹⁷ We appear to have growing evidence, in short, for a major volcanic eruption in central America in the 530s which was capable of contributing to not only local but also regional and hemispheric scale social change, possibly establishing it as one of the natural events to have had the greatest and most widespread impact on human societies known to history.

The dust-cloud event of ca. 535–536 was noted in particular in a series of eyewitness accounts written by authors living within or on the fringes of the East Roman or Byzantine world (for which we possess an especially rich body of literary sources).¹⁸ Some time in the late 540s, for example, the contemporary historian Procopius of Caesarea wrote of how, ca. 536–537 (when he was probably on active military service in Italy), “it came about during this year that a most dread portent took place. For the Sun gave forth its light without brightness, like the Moon, during the whole year, and it seemed exceedingly like the Sun in eclipse, for the beams it shed were not clear nor such as it is accustomed to shed. And from the time when this thing happened men were free neither from war nor pestilence nor any other thing leading to death.”¹⁹ Recounting the visit to Constantinople of Pope Agapetus I in 536, a work attributed to the ecclesiastical historian Zacharias of Mytilene (writing from Mesopotamia) recounted that “the Earth with all that is upon it quaked, and the Sun began to be darkened by day and the Moon by night, while the ocean was tumultuous with spray from the 24th March in this year until the 24th of June in the following year ... And, as the winter was a severe one, so much so that through the large and unwonted quantity of snow the birds perished ... there was distress ... among men ... from evil things.”²⁰ Writing in Constantinople itself, the bureaucrat and scholar John Lydus recorded that, in 535–536, for nearly a whole year, in Europe moisture “gathered into clouds dimming the light of the Sun, so that it did not come into our sight or pierce this dense substance.”²¹ In 536, an Irish chronicle known as the *Annals of Ulster* refers to a “failure of bread” and associated famine.²²

Indeed, the dust-cloud event of ca. 535–536 and its aftermath may even have been discernible as far afield as China and Japan: the author of the *Nan Shi (The History of the Southern Dynasties)*, for example, recorded how late in 535 “yellow dust rained down like snow” while other sources refer to yellow dust or ashes raining down from the sky in 536 and 537 and bitter frosts ruining crops in Qingzhou (roughly on the same line

17 Harper, *Fate of Rome*, 219 and 249–59. Note, in addition, the evidence for a major volcanic eruption that appears to have occurred in Iceland at around the same time: see Loveluck et al., “Alpine Ice-Core,” 1575.

18 These and other related sources were first collected by the archaeologist and journalist David Keys, to whom scholarship owes a considerable and largely unacknowledged debt: see Keys, *Catastrophe*. Many of his hypotheses have been essentially confirmed by subsequent scientific research (*contra* Arjava, “Mystery Cloud”).

19 Procopius, *De Bellis*, 4.14.5–6.

20 See Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 65 and *Pseudo-Zacharias of Mytilene, Chronicle*, 9.19.

21 John Lydus, *De Ostentis*, 9.

22 Keys, *Catastrophe*, 120; see also Dooley, “Plague and Its Consequences,” 216.

of latitude as southern Spain).²³ The early Japanese chronicle known as the *Nihonshoki* attributed an edict to the Japanese Great King, Senka, in which he declared in 536: “Food is the basis of the empire. Yellow gold and ten thousand strings of cash cannot cure hunger. What avails a thousand boxes of pearls to him who is starving of cold?”²⁴

“Heavy Trouble in Europe”

Although John Lydus viewed the climatic event of 535–536 with grim foreboding, he did not regard it as a harbinger of universal doom, and nor should we. Rather, he regarded its impact as at its most pronounced in the Eastern Roman Empire’s European territories and in the west: “If the Sun becomes dim because the air is dense from rising moisture, as happened in the course of the recently passed fourteenth indiction [535–536] for nearly a whole year ... so that the produce was destroyed because of the bad time—it predicts heavy trouble in Europe. And thus we have seen from the events themselves, when many wars broke out in the west and the tyranny was dissolved, while India, and the Persian realm, and whatever dry land lies towards the rising Sun, were not troubled at all. And it was not even likely that those regions would be affected by the calamity.”²⁵ In other words, already wetter and colder regions suffered more from the dramatic drop in temperatures that occurred in the “Late Antique Little Ice Age” than dryer and warmer ones.

This suggestion would, again, appear to be substantially borne out by the proxy data of tree-ring and other evidence. There are some indications, for example, that the fifth and early sixth centuries had already witnessed a significant drop in temperatures in northwestern Europe. An associated increase in levels of precipitation may have served to make arable agriculture considerably more difficult—especially in river valleys—meaning that peasants and farmers had an incentive to move towards mixed farming with a greater emphasis on pastoralism, and also to migrate into upland zones so as to avoid flood lands.²⁶ New plough types would ultimately need to be developed to cope with heavier and wetter early medieval soils.²⁷ Chronic military insecurity associated with barbarian invasion and the collapse of Roman power in the west, moreover, had provided a further and no-less-pressing incentive for peasants and others to adopt such strategies of avoidance.²⁸ A similar strategy would be adopted by Byzantine communities on the Anatolian plateau, for example, in the seventh and eighth centuries when faced with almost yearly Arab raids.²⁹ The climate event of the 530s may thus have served to push societies in western Europe further down a developmental path upon which

23 The Chinese sources are collated in Keys, *Catastrophe*, 159–60.

24 Cited in Keys, *Catastrophe*, 181.

25 John Lydus, *De Ostentiis*, 9.

26 Chayette, “Disappearance.”

27 Henning, “Strong Rulers”; Henning, “Revolution or Relapse.”

28 Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 75–76; Faith, “Forces and Relations.”

29 England et al., “Historical Landscape.”

earlier climatic developments and objective military conditions had already set them. The same longer-term climatic tendencies that appear to have served to problematize arable farming in the fifth- and sixth-century west, we should also note, appear to have contributed to considerable economic efflorescence along the surviving Eastern Roman Empire's desert fringe, where the late fifth and early sixth centuries were associated with a considerable expansion of agriculture.³⁰ In its Balkan territories, however, conditions were clearly very different, and the legislation of the emperor Justinian records a major famine in the region at this time.³¹

The impact of climate change in the Early Middle Ages would thus have depended to a great extent on the ecological context in which each society and its sub-regions already operated, and also, crucially, each society's comparative degree of social hierarchy and economic complexity, for, as archaeological theorists have long appreciated, the more outwardly "sophisticated" a society, the more vulnerable it tends to be to systemic collapse in the context of sudden change.³² As we have seen, the complex southern Mayan societies that bore the direct brunt of the Ilopango eruption were clearly devastated by the cataclysm that befell them, while, for the elite of Teotihuacan, it may have been their longer-term inability to contain and control the consequences of that event that was perhaps their undoing. The increasingly ruralized, deurbanized and demonetized societies of northwestern Europe in the sixth century (of which lowland Britain presents the most extreme example), in which elites were increasingly living directly off the produce of their land according to regimes of proto-manorial autarky, were arguably more resilient to bouts of climatic instability than the Eastern Roman Empire, which was critically dependent for its bureaucratic and military cohesion on the regular collection of monetized taxes, primarily levied on the land, and the associated commutation of agricultural produce for cash through sophisticated networks of market exchange.³³

There is considerable evidence, for example, for growing fiscal frailty on the part of the East Roman state across the long sixth century, and it is noteworthy that in the 530s both the emperor Justinian (527–565 CE) and his great imperial rival, the Persian shah Khusro I, engaged in simultaneous and seemingly parallel programmes of internal reform aimed at maximizing the fiscal resources at their disposal.³⁴ Byzantine, Chinese, and Japanese observers, moreover, were evidently very concerned at the impact on agriculture of climatic instability, and, by inference, the impact on state revenues. But Justinian's reform programme was already under way as the sun was dimming above Constantinople, and the desire of both Justinian and Khusro to bolster their respective imperial coffers is likely to have been primarily driven by the mounting costs of warfare between the two great sedentary empires of western Eurasia (which had erupted on a

30 See Decker, *Hateful Earth*.

31 Justinian, *Novellae*, 32, 33.

32 See Tainter, *Collapse*.

33 See Sarris, "Justinianic Plague"; Sarris, "Manorial Economy."

34 Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 125–68.

massive scale in 502) and the wish of each ruler to achieve greater political and economic autonomy from their respective empires' landowning elites.

Vulnerability to climate change also depended on the hydraulic underpinnings of each society. In southern Arabia, for example, the semi-autonomous Christian Ethiopian (or Axumite) protectorate which had been established over Himyar (the Yemen) in the 520s appears to have been dealt a major blow by the deterioration and collapse of the great Marib dam from the 540s onwards, which seems to have resulted from a series of massive deluges, such that by ca. 590 the dam was abandoned, propelling a number of south Arabian peoples and tribes northwards.³⁵ The floods that served to destroy the Marib dam would later be alluded to in the *Qurʾān*, with the rise and fall of Axumite power in the Yemen serving to transform both political and cultural conditions in south-central Arabia on the eve of Islam:

They [Mankind] were wicked so We sent on them the flood of Iram [the dam of Marib] and in exchange for their two [good] gardens [We] gave them two [bad] gardens bearing bitter fruit ... This We awarded them because of their ingratitude ... They wronged themselves ... therefore We ... scattered them abroad—a total scattering.³⁶

Likewise, there is evidence that the fifth and early sixth centuries were associated with rising sea levels, which affected the coastline of northern Germany especially severely; in response to this, the archaeological evidence reveals widespread contraction and abandonment of settlement sites. It is noteworthy in this context that, writing in the eighth century, the Anglo-Saxon churchman and scholar the Venerable Bede would claim that his ancestors, whom he identified as “Angles,” were said to have originated in a territory lying between that of the continental Saxons (northwest Rhineland) and that of the Jutes (Jutland), which, he asserted, had remained deserted of inhabitants from that day to his. There is also evidence for the settlement of Angles and Saxons in Normandy and Picardy that may well have taken place at around this time and that is also likely to have been motivated by the same “push factors.”³⁷

Instability on the Steppe

Outside of Mesoamerica and the Yemen, the direct impact of climatic instability at the dawn of the Early Middle Ages was arguably at its most pronounced, however, with respect to the grasslands of the Eurasian steppe that served to connect the borders of Byzantium and Persia to the west with the polities of Central Asia, Manchuria, and China to the east. For political and military conditions on the steppe were critically sensitive to variations in climate. Any abnormal fluctuation in temperature across the steppe risked having a dramatic impact on the availability and quality of grassland on which

35 Munt et al., “Arabic and Persian,” 441–42.

36 *Qurʾān*, 34:16; Robin, “Himyar, Aksum,” 127–71.

37 James, *Britain*, 110.

the nomadic powers and tribal confederations of the region depended for their military might, for these were primarily cavalry empires, their warriors famed for their swiftness on horseback and dexterity with bow, reliant on a ready supply of well-fed mounts.³⁸ A late-sixth-century Byzantine military handbook (known as the *Strategikon of Maurice*), for example, noted of such “Scythians ... and others whose way of life resembles that of the Hunnic peoples,” that they could be

hurt by a shortage of fodder which can result from the huge numbers of horses they bring with them. Also, in the event of a battle, when opposed by an infantry force in close formation, they stay on their horses and do not dismount, for they do not last long fighting on foot.³⁹

An earlier phase of climatic instability on the steppe in the fourth century may have been associated with the westward expansion of Hunnic power at that time, which served to cast into turmoil both the Persian and Roman worlds.⁴⁰ Certainly, the era of climatic variation identifiable with the 530s and 540s would appear to have coincided with a major reconfiguration of power across the steppe and Central Asia, resulting in a renewed period of political and military insecurity for both Byzantium, Persia, and China associated, by the 550s, with the rise of a new nomadic power in the form of the “Türk qaghanate,” which propelled its rivals (known as the Avars) westwards towards the Pannonian plateau to the north of the Danube, and eastwards towards Korea, and in the process destroying the empire of the Hephthalite Huns which had previously established itself on the borders of Sasanian Persia.⁴¹

This period of instability thus impacted on the sedentary empires that bordered Central Asia in different ways: with respect to the Chinese world, the Türks appear to have deliberately encouraged conflict between the Zhou and Qi dynasties, which were locked in a struggle for control of northern China at this time. According to the Chinese sources, the two dynasties each agreed to pay the Türks 100,000 rolls of silk per year in return for their neutrality.⁴² It has been suggested that the figure of 100,000 rolls may simply have been used proverbially by the Chinese sources to mean “a lot,” and that a more likely indicator of the possible scale of tribute is provided by a parallel instance dating from the early ninth century, when the Uyghur Türks are more securely recorded to have extracted 500,000 rolls of silk per year from the Chinese.⁴³ The Türks also obtained silk from the Chinese through trading as well as tributary relations, in particular, through supplying the Chinese with horses and other commodities. In 553, for example, the Türks are recorded to have brought 50,000 horses to the Chinese frontier

38 See Randsborg, *First Millennium*, 29; Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, 133.

39 Maurice, *Strategikon*, 11.2.

40 See Harper, *Fate of Rome*, 190–95; Heather, “Huns and the End”; Payne, “Reinvention of Iran.”

41 Szádky-Kardoss, “The Avars”; Pohl, *Awaren*; Beckwith, *Empires*, 103–4, 113–14, 390–91n18, 407n59; Rezakhani, *Reorienting the Sasanians*.

42 De la Vassière, *Sogdian Traders*, 209–10.

43 De la Vassière, “Trans-Asian Trade,” 112.

for the purposes of exchange.⁴⁴ They then appear to have tried to sell a (perhaps significant) share of this Chinese silk on to both Persian and East Roman markets, where silk was a highly prized commodity.⁴⁵ At an economic level, therefore, the era of Türk ascendancy across Central Asia appears to have been associated with an intensification of patterns of interregional trade, with the Türks profiting from their control of the Central Asian economy, which they exploited with the aid of Sogdian merchants.⁴⁶

Politically, however, the Türks caused considerable destabilization within northern China, and, through encouraging the eastward migration of the Avars helped to recast political and military conditions in the Korean Peninsula. Likewise, at the western end of the Eurasian steppe, although the undermining of Hephthalite power associated with Türk expansion initially enabled the Persian shah Khusro I to devote more military manpower to confronting the East Roman ambitions in the Caucasus in the 540s and early 550s, by 557 the establishment of Türk power on the borders of Persia obliged the Persians to disengage from (and ultimately, in 562, surrender to the Byzantines) the crucial west Caucasian kingdom of Lazica. In 571 the Türks would incite warfare between the East Roman and Sasanian empires, by encouraging the emperor Justin II to launch a major and unprovoked assault on the Persian-held city of Nisibis, while in the 620s the Türks would invade Persia in support of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (610–641 CE), enabling him to inflict a major defeat on the Persians in circumstances in which the Eastern Roman Empire had itself otherwise appeared on the verge of collapse.⁴⁷ The Türks, in short, became a cornerstone of East Roman strategy vis-à-vis its great superpower rival of Sasanian Persia, with the Romans playing upon a deeply rooted Persian sense of vulnerability to any military threat from the realm of the steppe which was engrained in the Sasanian imagination as well as the strategic geography of the Persianate world.⁴⁸

If the expansion of the Türk qaghanate was to Byzantium's great advantage in the Caucasus, on other fronts, however, it would have more troublesome consequences. For the flight of those Avars who did not flee to Korea to the westward end of the Eurasian steppe, and their ultimate settlement on the Pannonian plain (to the north of the Danube) would cause the Roman authorities mounting problems, as (from the 580s onwards) it increasingly compelled Slavonic and other groups hitherto resident beyond the Danube to strike into and begin to settle in Roman territory in the Balkans, migrating as far south as Greece and the Peloponnese so as to escape Avar hegemony. As a result, the south-central Balkans would increasingly slip out of direct Roman control.⁴⁹ Likewise, from the late 560s, groups of Lombards and Gepids hitherto resident in the western Balkans and Central Europe would begin to cross into Italy and begin to settle there, seemingly, yet

44 Barfield, *Perilous Frontier*, 133.

45 De la Vassière, *Sogdian Traders*, 209–10.

46 De la Vassière, *Sogdian Traders*, 209–10; and Payne, "Silk Road."

47 Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 226–58.

48 See discussion in Payne, "Reinvention of Iran."

49 Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 169–82.

again, at least in part so as to escape the Avars. As a result, the Italian territories which the East Roman emperor Justinian had only recently brought back under direct imperial control through a series of campaigns between 535 and 553, once more became increasingly difficult to defend. In 626, an Avar attempt to breach the land defences of Constantinople itself was believed by contemporaries only to have been thwarted by the miraculous intervention of the city's divine protector, the Virgin Mary, who was seen fighting on its walls.

The Avar assault on Constantinople, it should be noted, had been coordinated with a simultaneous Persian assault on the city from the Asiatic shore: in the 620s, each of the great sedentary empires of western Eurasia were thus engaged in parallel steppe strategies, seeking to harness the transformation of power relations to which climate change in the 530s and 540s seems to have contributed, with the Persians mobilizing the Avars and the Romans forging a close alliance with the Türks. In the years that followed, the ability of the East Roman authorities to contain a new threat—that of the emergent power of Islam—would be severely constrained by the fact that the Arab advance over Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, and their dismantling of the Persian empire, would coincide with a renewed period of crisis on the steppe and a collapse of Türk power, such that, at a crucial moment in time, Byzantium lacked a reliable steppe neighbour with whom to coordinate resistance to the Arabs. In the early 640s, for example, a newly stable nomad state, the Khazar “qaghanate,” was only just taking root to the north of the Caucasus in place of the Türks, and was yet to be fully incorporated diplomatically by Constantinople.

Further east, however, the demise of the Türks permitted the consolidation of the Tang dynasty in China.⁵⁰ It should also be noted that the demise of the Türks, like their earlier ascendancy, may have been informed by climatic conditions and other exogenous phenomena: for, ca. 626, both the Byzantine and Chinese sources appear to record a major volcanic eruption also reflected in the ice-core data to which the ecology of Central Asia may again have been highly sensitive.⁵¹ Certainly, in 627, according to the Chinese evidence, disastrous weather killed flocks and led to widespread famine across the Türk empire, which soon fuelled political unrest as the qaghanate's Sogdian administrators nevertheless attempted to press ahead with tax collection. The result was civil war and secessionist tendencies that the Tang seized upon to combine with the rebellious Xueyantuo people to crush the Türk army once and for all, as a result of which the Tang ruler Taizong “took for himself the title of heavenly Qaghan and thereby claimed suzerainty over both the Chinese and the Türks.”⁵² One empire's famine was thus another empire's feast.

50 Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 444; Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 148–50.

51 For references, see Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 260 and 379n197.

52 Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 149–50. See also di Cosmo et al., “Interplay.”

Dust Veils and Disease

Climate change and instability may also have played a crucial part in the other great external blow to befall the historically recorded societies of the early medieval world in the sixth to eighth centuries, namely the bubonic plague. Bubonic disease would appear to have first reached Europe from Central Asia (where it seems to have remained enzootic among the rodent population) at some point in the Late Neolithic era, and appears to have persisted in the Caucasus.⁵³ Other long-standing foci of plague activity have also been identified in the Himalayas and Central Africa, although neither of these were “ancient.”⁵⁴ Thereafter, we have no unambiguous evidence for the plague having had a continuous presence in Europe or the Mediterranean world beyond the Caucasus prior to the sixth century, although the medical author Rufus of Ephesus does record an earlier outbreak of what would seem to have been bubonic disease in the first to second century CE. However, in 541 CE, bubonic plague struck the important Egyptian entrepôt of Pelusium, from where it spread to Alexandria, the rest of Egypt, and to Palestine.⁵⁵ A harrowing account of the immediate impact of the plague within Egypt is recorded in the writings of the contemporary ecclesiastical historian John of Ephesus, who witnessed the ravages of the disease at first hand as he was travelling from Alexandria, to Constantinople, via Palestine and Syria. John relates, for example, that “it was told about one city on the Egyptian border [that] it perished totally and completely with [only] seven men and one little boy ten years old remaining in it.”⁵⁶ By the spring of 542, the disease had reached the imperial capital of Constantinople, where the emperor Justinian was reported to have been struck down by it—although he was subsequently to recover.⁵⁷ The same year the plague reached the cities of Syria, the western Balkans, North Africa, and Spain. By 543, the pestilence had further extended its reach to embrace Armenia, Italy, and Gaul, before eventually reaching the British Isles, Ireland, and ultimately, it would appear on the basis of the archaeological evidence, Scandinavia.⁵⁸ DNA from the causative agent responsible for bubonic plague (*Yersinia pestis*) has been identified from early medieval burial sites from Bavaria, southern France, Spain, and southern

53 Andrades Valtuena et al., “Stone Age Plague.”

54 Here I modify Sarris, “Bubonic Plague,” 120–21.

55 Procopius, *De Bellis*, 2.22.6. For Rufus of Ephesus, who preserved accounts recorded by earlier authors of a bubonic disease of some sort which had previously occurred in Libya, Egypt, and Syria: see Green, “Putting Africa.”

56 Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 77.

57 Procopius, *De Bellis*, 2 22.9–23; Procopius, *Anecdota*, 4.1.

58 Little, *Plague*, and Meier, “Justinianic Plague,” provide the best collection of studies relating to these occurrences with supporting references. In their stimulating recent contribution, Eisenberg and Mordechai, “Justinianic Plague,” and Moredechai and Eisenberg, “Rejecting Catastrophe,” arguably overplay their hand with respect to both source criticism and the genetic and climatic data, which is handled somewhat patchily. Their overview of the historiography of the plague is also a little overly sensationalist, inventing a non-existent school of “maximalist” and “Justinianic Plague” historians for largely rhetorical purposes.

England, while later Arab accounts would represent the disease as widespread in the seventh-century Sasanian empire.⁵⁹

The Egyptian port of Pelusium where the plague is first recorded to have struck was, we should note, heavily integrated into the commercial economy not only of the Mediterranean but also of the Red Sea—via the port of Clysma, connected to Pelusium by the emperor Trajan's Nile–Red Sea Canal.⁶⁰ It thus may be significant that two of the contemporary Byzantine authors who witnessed the ravages of the disease (Evagrius and John of Ephesus) indicate that the disease reached Roman territory from Ethiopia: Evagrius explicitly associated the origin of the disease with Ethiopia, while John of Ephesus claimed that it arrived “from the land of Kush,” by which he meant the territory of Nubia, between Egypt and Ethiopia, having begun “at first amongst the peoples inland of the countries of the south-east of India, that is of Kush, Himyarites, and others.”⁶¹ Himyar (the Yemen) was at that point, as we have seen, under Ethiopian-Aksumite occupation, and it should be noted that it was common for sixth-century Byzantine sources to use the term “India” to refer to “Ethiopia,” the Aksumite kingdom of which John of Ephesus regarded as exercising dominion over Kush at this time.⁶² It is also noteworthy that the extant Arabic sources would thereafter regard both Ethiopia and the Sudan (embracing Nubia) as rife with plague.⁶³

The primary vector of bubonic plague has typically consisted of fleas borne by rodents such as the black rat (*Rattus rattus*), which is well attested in East Africa and southeastern Africa from southern Zambia to Zanzibar during the first millennium CE, as well as being present in the Roman Mediterranean.⁶⁴ There is also evidence for East Roman commercial connections to Zanzibar at this time, possibly connected to the ivory trade.⁶⁵ “It is thus perfectly plausible,” as an authority on late-antique East Africa has observed, “that the infection was brought from [there] to Pelusium by ship. Such a voyage must have passed through the Red Sea and would have been regarded by Byzantines as having come from ‘Ethiopia,’ whatever precise meaning may have been attached to that term.”⁶⁶ It is thus conceivable that change in climatic conditions in the 530s may have forced plague-bearing rodents in East Africa and southeastern Africa to forage ever further afield for food, thereby transmitting the disease via fleas to local black rat populations, who then in turn transmitted the fleas (and disease) to humans.⁶⁷

59 See Little, *Plague*; Wagner et al., “*Yersinia pestis*”; Keller et al., “Ancient *Yersinia pestis*”; and Dols, “Early Islamic History.” The sixth-century plague has been identified, for example, in an Anglo-Saxon burial site on Edix Hill near Cambridge, just a few minutes’ drive from the author’s home.

60 Sarris, “Justinianic Plague.”

61 Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.29; John of Ephesus, in Michael the Syrian, *Chronicon*, 9.28.305.

62 Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 31; Hatke, *Aksum and Nubia*, 261 (*contra* Harper, *Fate of Rome*, 218).

63 Dols, “Early Islamic History,” 372–73.

64 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 207; Horton, *Shanga*, 386–87; Harper, *Fate of Rome*, 210–14.

65 Horton, *Shanga*; Keys, *Catastrophe*, 309.

66 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 207.

67 As suggested by Keys, *Catastrophe*.

This hypothesis is potentially undermined by the fact that the extant strain of bubonic plague closest to that identified in the early medieval burial sites is to be found on the western side of the Tian Shan mountains in Kyrgyzstan.⁶⁸ Likewise, the “clade basal” to the sixth-century plague has been found in the vicinity of Western China, recently leading some to postulate that the plague may have reached the sixth-century Mediterranean from China via silk-road trade, either across Central Asia or via the Indian Ocean.⁶⁹ Although the scientific evidence is fast moving, at the time of writing the counter-hypothesis should still be regarded as problematic. While the early medieval strain of bubonic plague that has been identified through DNA analysis is clearly related to the Chinese or Central Asian lineages, they are not the same (the “Justinianic” strain probably having diverged around the first century BCE), and the relationship between them would perhaps be better understood in the context of the evidence for a much earlier emergence of bubonic disease from Central Asia (possibly that recorded by Rufus of Ephesus), which may then have become focalized in Africa before re-emerging in late antiquity.⁷⁰ Certainly, there would appear to have been plenty of time for an ancient Central Asian version of the disease to have reached East Africa and to have established a reservoir there before spreading beyond to the Mediterranean world. It is perhaps noteworthy, for example, that an epidemic of some sort of plague is also reported to have occurred in Ethiopia (in this instance probably meaning Nubia) in the third century.⁷¹

Second, had the sixth-century plague originated in either China or Central Asia, one would have expected Sasanian Persia to have been struck by the plague before Byzantium was, as there is every indication that by the sixth century Persia both overwhelmingly dominated maritime trade with India and the Hindu Kush (which connected to China and Central Asia), and was the route through which, until the late 550s, all land-borne trade between the Mediterranean, Central Asia, and China passed.⁷² Yet Byzantium would appear to have been affected by the plague prior to Persia: the Persian army was struck by the plague when fighting the Romans in Armenia in 543, for example, while the so-called “Plague of Shirawayh,” which beset the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon in 627/8, was conceivably the result of the arrival of either Persian or even Roman troops from the west in the context of the closing stages of Heraclius’ Persian campaign.⁷³ Rather than passing from east to west, the sixth-century plague may well in fact have been transmitted back across to Central Asia from west to east via Byzantium: according to the seventh-century East Roman historian Theophylact Simocatta, for example, a plague of

68 Damgaard et al., “Ancient Human Genomes,” 372.

69 Wagner et al., “*Yersinia pestis*”; Harper, *Fate of Rome*, 218, Damgaard et al., “Ancient Human Genomes.”

70 Little, “Plague Historians,” 284; Schamiloglu, “Plague,” 298–300. I owe this suggestion to Professor Monica H. Green.

71 The author is extremely grateful to Professor Monica H. Green for instruction on this and related points through personal communication: see also Green, “Putting Africa,” for further discussion of Africa’s possible role in the Justinianic plague.

72 Payne, “Silk Road.”

73 Procopius, *De Bellis*, 2.24; Dols, “Early Islamic History,” 376.

some sort among the “eastern Scythians” in the mid to late sixth century was alluded to in an encounter between Türk prisoners of war and the Byzantine emperor Maurice ca. 591.⁷⁴ Likewise, the Chinese sources record that the Türks were afflicted by a major famine and epidemic in 585.⁷⁵ Plague was not, however, regarded as endemic to the Türk homeland in Central Asia (the Issyk Kul region), as the same Theophylact recorded that there “they claim that from the very beginning of time they have never witnessed an epidemic of plague.”⁷⁶ The claim that the plague passed from Central Asia to Byzantium by land in the sixth century is completely incompatible with the clear testimony of the written sources that the disease first arrived in the southern Mediterranean. The recent identification of detectable levels of *Yersinia pestis* DNA in the remains of one individual (described by the scientists as “a Hun”) from the vicinity of the Tian Shan mountains dating from ca. 180 CE alluded to above, and in another (described as “from the Alan culture from North Ossetia”) and “estimated archaeologically to date to the sixth–ninth centuries AD” in no way undermines those sources.⁷⁷

Moreover, there is no clear mention of a bubonic-style plague having affected China in the Chinese sources prior to the Justinianic outbreak.⁷⁸ One possible outbreak of bubonic disease among the southern dynasty is recorded as having struck the capital of Liang in 549 (although the pestilence concerned occurred in the context of famine, warfare, and siege), and the sources record a number of other outbreaks of disease of a possibly bubonic character in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.⁷⁹ Sui China’s most authoritative medical compendium (the *Zhubing yuanhou lun*), for example, describes an illness very similar to the modern bubonic plague. That work was not compiled, however, until ca. 610.⁸⁰ From that point on, however, mentions of epidemic episodes proliferate, with “abundant evidence documenting numerous waves of epidemic disease in China and Japan during the T’ang dynasty (618–907).”⁸¹ An intense series of outbreaks of epidemic disease in China from 635 to 655 (when West Asia was suffering from repeated bouts of the bubonic plague) was followed by further occurrences in 682 and 707, while “a long list of regular outbreaks of epidemic disease in Japan and Korea” is attested to have begun in 698.⁸² A major outbreak of disease is also recorded to have occurred in

74 Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia*, 5.10.14–15.

75 Whitby and Whitby, *Theophylact*, 191n45.

76 Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia*, 7.8.13. This is despite the clear genetic evidence for an early strain of the plague in this region identified by Damgaard, “Ancient Human Genomes.”

77 Damgaard et al., “Ancient Human Genomes,” 373.

78 McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 147.

79 Lee, “Environment, Epidemics,” 112–14.

80 Lee, “Environment, Epidemics,” 114. Further work, however, needs to be done on the East Asian sources, as historians of East Asia have been primarily concerned with the Black Death and later epidemics.

81 Schamiloglu, “Plague,” 297.

82 Schamiloglu, “Plague,” 297.

Tibet in 739–740.⁸³ Whether these Far Eastern occurrences were all bubonic in character (as opposed to consisting of diseases such as smallpox or typhoid) is, however, currently unclear, although some have argued that it is reasonable to infer that they were.⁸⁴

Nor, we should note, is there any evidence from the extensive subcontinental sources for either the sixth-century plague or the fourteenth-century Black Death to have affected India (as one might have expected it to had it traversed the Hindu Kush).⁸⁵ If there is one lesson to be learned from study of the sixth-century (or “Justinianic”) plague over the past thirty years, it is that one would do well to trust the testimony of our extensive “literary” sources: doubts on the part of both archaeologists and biologists, for example, in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s as to whether the disease was actually bubonic in character (which the literary sources always indicated that it *was*) have proven to be completely unfounded.⁸⁶

“The Encircling Presence of Death”

Whatever the origin of the disease, the contemporary narrative sources available to the historian of the early medieval Mediterranean world and its surrounding territories—be they from east or west, or written in Latin, Greek, Syriac, or Arabic—speak with one voice in describing the plague as having had a major and sudden impact on both urban and rural communities alike.⁸⁷ Our contemporary Roman historian Procopius, for example, who was present in Constantinople when the plague first struck in 542, describes how at one point it struck down over 10,000 victims a day, with the dead being disposed of in mass graves in the sea and beyond the city walls. The emperor Justinian, in a law dating from 542, referred to “the encircling presence of death.”⁸⁸ Likewise, John of Ephesus witnessed “villages whose inhabitants perished altogether.”⁸⁹ As he made his way through Syria, John describes passing “houses and waystations occupied only by the dead, corpses lying in the fields and along the roadside, and cattle wandering untended in the hills.”⁹⁰ The late-sixth-century churchman Evagrius, whose own family was struck by the disease, and who was himself afflicted with it as a boy, recorded that the plague, like the imperial tax assessment or “indiction,” returned in a fifteen-year cycle to lay low each new generation. On the borders of Syria, the Arab poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit described the plague as the “stinging of the *jinn*,” devastating the rural population of the desert fringe. A high rate of mortality is also recorded with respect to Gaul in the writings of

⁸³ Schamiloglu, “Plague,” 302.

⁸⁴ Schamiloglu, “Plague,” 302.

⁸⁵ Sarris, “Justinianic Plague”; Sussman, “Black Death.”

⁸⁶ Sarris, “Justinianic Plague”; Horden, “Mediterranean Plague”; Little, “Plague Historians.”

⁸⁷ See Meier, “Justinianic Plague,” for extensive discussion.

⁸⁸ Justinian, *Novella*, 7.

⁸⁹ Wittakowski, Pseudo-Dionysius, 75.

⁹⁰ Wittakowski, Pseudo-Dionysius, 81.

Gregory of Tours.⁹¹ Throughout the areas affected, it would recur through to the mid eighth century.⁹²

As already indicated, there is no good reason to gainsay these eyewitness accounts, which increasingly appear to receive archaeological support from evidence for multiple burials and other signs of disruption.⁹³ There is considerable evidence, for example, that high rates of plague-induced mortality disrupted military operations in the early 540s by the eastern Roman authorities in Italy as well as by the Persians in the Caucasus.⁹⁴ A sudden loss of taxpayers resulting from the plague can also be seen to have wrought havoc with imperial finances, obliging the East Roman state to retrench expenditure on civil-service pensions and military pay and to debase the gold coinage, issuing payments in the form of light-weight *solidi* while presumably demanding that tax collectors receive only the full-weight coins.⁹⁵ With the fiscal pressures on the East Roman state resultant from warfare with Persia and the ongoing conquest of Italy remaining at least constant at this time, diminishing tax revenues had to be spread ever more thinly. Crisis-driven measures would also have to be introduced to deal with the consequences of sudden labour shortages and the problems posed by intestate succession as heads of families unexpectedly died without making proper provision for their heirs.⁹⁶

In Britain, where the arrival of plague coincided with chronic military and political insecurity, the archaeological evidence points to a staggering demographic collapse, with the population perhaps halving over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries (thus perhaps providing some geographically peripheral support for Procopius' often dismissed claim that the plague wiped out half of mankind).⁹⁷ At the end of the seventh century, the Anglo-Saxon church would effectively have to be reconstituted from scratch by the archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore, partly in response to the devastating impact of the plague on its administrative structures and personnel.⁹⁸ In the East African kingdom of Axum, the second quarter of the sixth century (when the plague is known to have been rampaging elsewhere), is "precisely the period during which the beginnings of Aksumite decline may first be discerned in the archaeological record. For example, this was the time when the deterioration of the Aksumite coinage first became apparent," thus perhaps mirroring the Byzantine experience.⁹⁹

To some extent, the significance and impact of the plague would again have depended on the degree of hierarchy and the balance of social forces within each of

91 For references, see Sarris, "Justinianic Plague," much of which I repeat here.

92 For a catalogue of recurrence, see Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence*.

93 McCormick, "Tracking Mass Death I"; McCormick, "Tracking Mass Death II"; Meier, "Justinianic Plague."

94 See Procopius, *De Bellis*, 2.24; Teall, "Barbarians."

95 Sarris, "Justinianic Plague."

96 Justinian, *Novellae*, 122, 158.

97 Wickham, *Framing*, 312; Procopius, *Anecdota* 18.44. See also Meier, "Justinianic Plague," 271.

98 Maddicott, "Seventh-Century England."

99 Phillipson, *Foundations*, 206–7.

the societies concerned. Everywhere it struck, the bubonic plague was probably associated with a tsunami of human misery, but, as with sudden climate instability, the more complex a society, the more structurally unstable demographic collapse threatened to render it (although as the parallel example of the Black Death in fourteenth-century Europe should remind us, even highly complex societies could be strikingly resilient in the face of large-scale demographic decline). Comparative degrees of urbanization also mattered, as denser settlements facilitated contagion. In the highly urbanized world of Byzantium in particular, the decades following the initial outbreak of the plague would be associated (as we have seen) with growing fiscal instability, which in turn fuelled political unrest and a heightening of social tensions, as peasants and labourers sought to take advantage of plague-induced labour shortages to improve their conditions of employment, and landowners and the imperial government then combined to attempt to roll back such gains.¹⁰⁰ In the early years of the seventh century, political instability associated with the downfall of the emperor Maurice (582–602 CE), who was unpopular in military circles due to his economizing tendencies and austerity agenda, would open the way to large-scale Persian invasion. The warfare between Rome and Persia that ensued would then leave each empire too exhausted to face down the forces of Islam as they advanced from northern Arabia in the 630s.¹⁰¹ Persia, as we have seen, would soon collapse in its entirety, while the empire of Constantinople would prove itself incapable of holding on to Egypt, Syria, and Palestine.

In the less hierarchical, less fiscalized, and less urbanized societies of early medieval western Europe, by contrast, the demographic impact of plague may have carried relatively few structural or superstructural consequences other perhaps than initially further intensifying a tendency towards greater peasant autonomy by undermining seigneurial control and leading to further depopulation of former Roman urban sites that were already, for the most part, in decline.¹⁰² It may be for that reason that some historians of the early medieval West have had difficulty discerning the qualitative impact of the disease in the societies on which they focus.¹⁰³ It is striking, for example, that in an English context it was in terms of the structures of the seventh-century church that the consequences of the plague were at their most destabilizing at the time or are at their most evident to historians today. In Ireland, too, ecclesiastical centres (which also served an urban function) seem to have been hardest hit.¹⁰⁴ In both Anglo-Saxon England and Ireland, however, lordly or royal structures of secular authority survived relatively unscathed, seemingly facilitated by succession systems that eschewed primogeniture “in

100 As argued in Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 222–27.

101 Sarris, “Justinianic Plague.”

102 See Ward-Perkins, “The Cities,” for the general context to early medieval urban contraction and economic simplification.

103 Wickham, *Framing*, 248.

104 Dooley, “Plague and Its Consequences,” 221.

favour of a succession among eligible male members of the extended family, and the frequent marriages of high status males.”¹⁰⁵

Consequently, the plague is also likely to have altered the balance of power between more hierarchical and urbanized societies and their less hierarchical and less densely urbanized neighbours, thus perhaps favouring Angles and Saxons over Romano-Britons (whose resistance to Anglo-Saxon rivals collapsed at this time); Berbers, Langobards, and Slavs over Romans; and Arabs over both Romans and Persians along the desert fringes of Palestine, Syria, and Iraq.¹⁰⁶ Even in the late seventh century, a major shortfall in military manpower associated with a renewed outbreak of the bubonic plague prevented the Byzantine emperor Justinian II from being able to take advantage of civil war within the nascent Islamic empire (known as the “second *fitna*”) to attempt to restore Roman rule to the Near East. Instead, he sought to remedy the demographic deficit that confronted him by negotiating the withdrawal of pro-Roman Christian insurgents from the Lebanon, and attempting to forcibly resettle the population of Cyprus and Slav prisoners of war on the Anatolian plateau.¹⁰⁷ As a result, Islamic rule was consolidated and the Umayyad caliphate (which at that point still primarily relied on tribal armies) would soon extend from the Indus to the Atlantic.

Cataclysm and *Mentalités*

If attempting to assess the impact of sudden climate change and demographic collapse on early medieval societies is problematic at the level of states, resources, and structures, then the impact of these same phenomena on the human *psyche* and at the level of imagination and belief is still more so. Yet no society can undergo processes of such sudden change without their having a profound impact on the mindsets and *mentalités* of those individuals and generations that are obliged to live through them. It is impossible, for example, not to sense the inner turmoil of those caught up in the plague when John of Ephesus describes how, in Constantinople during the first outbreak of the disease, residents would leave their homes wearing armbands bearing their names, so that, in the event of their sudden death, they would not simply be left to rot on the street or end up in an unmarked or mass grave.¹⁰⁸ While no causal connection can be demonstrated, it is striking that from Ireland to Japan, the late sixth and early seventh centuries constituted an era of religious transformation which it is difficult not to read as to at least some extent informed by the bewildering natural circumstances and conditions in which people found themselves and of which they attempted to make sense. It is thus perfectly reasonable for a causal connection to be inferred.¹⁰⁹

105 Dooley, “Plague and Its Consequences,” 223.

106 As suggested by Russell, “That Earlier Plague.”

107 Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 295–97.

108 Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 93; Meier, “Justinianic Plague,” 278.

109 See especially for the Byzantine world, Meier, “Justinianic Plague.”

In the world of Europe and the Mediterranean, contemporary responses to plague can be seen to have combined intensified Christian pietism and apocalyptic expectations on the part of some, with a rejection of Christian faith and an attempted reconnection to older religious traditions on the part of others. For, as one distinguished observer of the religious culture of the era has observed, “one of the more fascinating aspects of the Justinianic Plague is that it occurs at a time when Christianity, while progressing steadily, does not reign supreme and has not, in many instances or places, grown roots so deep that it cannot be swept away by the winds of panic.”¹¹⁰

In Byzantium, as is also discernible on the part of Christian thinkers operating on the fringes of or beyond the political frontiers of the empire of Constantinople, a heightened sense of the imminence of the biblically foretold Apocalypse is certainly discernible in the late sixth century.¹¹¹ It would inform propaganda disseminated on the part of the emperor Heraclius against the Persians in the early seventh century, for example, while also being at the forefront of the writings of both Pope Gregory the Great and the Frankish churchman Gregory of Tours.¹¹² For partly technical reasons bound up with Christian theology and the computational traditions that underlay the emergent genre of historical writing known as the Christian world chronicle, the early sixth century had already been associated with a heightened sense of the imminence of the Apocalypse.¹¹³ But objective circumstances, including warfare, plague, and climatic chaos now sent such expectations skyrocketing. In the reign of the Frankish king Chilperic (561–584 CE), for example, Gregory of Tours believed he had witnessed the “beginnings of the pains” that Christ had foretold to his disciples: “there will be plagues, famines and earthquakes in various places, and false Christs and false prophets will rise up and they will make signs and prodigies in the sky so as to induce the chosen into error, as has happened nowadays.”¹¹⁴ At the time of a recurrence of the plague in 684 (the one that prevented Justinian II from taking advantage of the “second *fitna*”), an Old Irish law text known as the *Corus Béscnai* noted: “there are three occasions when the world is in disorder: a sudden onset of plague, the flood of war, and when verbal contracts are dissolved.”¹¹⁵ In both Byzantium and Francia, moreover, it has been suggested that the impact of the plague may have informed intensified devotion to the cult of the Virgin Mary, who was strongly associated with healing.¹¹⁶

A growing liturgification and sacralization of the imperial and royal office is also evident across the Christian world at this time, as rulers perhaps attempted to bolster their authority in the face of suspicions on their part of subjects—that we can trace from Constantinople to Ireland—that the plague was, in some sense, a punishment for the

110 Stoclet, “*Consilio humana*,” 136.

111 For Byzantium, see Meier, “Justinianic Plague.”

112 Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 218–19; Stoclet, “*Consilio humana*,” 138–39.

113 See Mango, *Byzantium*, 204.

114 Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, 6.46.8.5.

115 Cited in Dooley, “Plague and Its Consequences,” 224.

116 Meier, “Justinianic Plague,” 284–87; Dooley, “Plague and Its Consequences,” 141–42.

moral character of those who ruled over them. In Byzantium, for example, Procopius emphasized what he believed to be the demonic nature of the emperor Justinian, while an Irish source asserted that “it is by the truth of the ruler that plagues, great hostings and great lightnings are kept from the people.”¹¹⁷ Likewise, in China, “Confucian political philosophy ... ascribed unnatural phenomena or disturbances on earth to illegitimate or unfit rulers ... The sudden death of a ruler and his family or an epidemic ravaging his population would be seen as a judgment of heaven.”¹¹⁸ Justinian preferred to blame the plague on the moral failings of his subjects, passing legislation against blasphemy and homosexuality which he expressly associated with the advent of disease.¹¹⁹

As already suggested, however, even within the Christian world, reactions to the unsettled conditions in which people found themselves were neither uniform nor unidirectional. One of the ways in which Pope Gregory the Great, for example, appears to have responded to his anticipation of the imminence of divine judgement was to send missionaries to England to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons (lowland Britain being the only region of the once Roman world that had been lost to the embrace of the church).¹²⁰ That mission arrived and set about its work in 597. A renewed bout of the plague in 664, however, not only took a heavy toll from among the personnel of the church but also led certain of those who had converted to question whether they should not, in fact, have stuck with the old gods. As Bede records of the East Saxons, for example:

while the plague was causing a heavy death-toll in the province, Sighere and his people abandoned the mysteries of the Christian faith, and relapsed into paganism. For the king himself, together with many of the nobles and common folk, loved this life and sought no other, or even disbelieved in its existence. Hoping for protection against the plague by this means, they therefore began to rebuild the ruined temples and restore the worship of idols.¹²¹

In Francia, likewise, while the church responded to the plague with rogation processions and claims of miraculous healing, others seemingly attempted to revive the pagan cult of Apollo Medicus, “at once the god of plague and Paris’ ancient tutelary divinity.”¹²² In Byzantium, the churchman Evagrius, much of whose family and household was wiped out by repeated bouts of plague, found himself questioning the mercy of God, especially when he saw those whom he regarded as pagans surviving such visitations seemingly unharmed.¹²³ Periods of existential crisis inevitably potentially opened the

117 For “liturgification” and sacralization, see Meier, “Justinianic Plague,” 288–92; Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 205–6; Stoclet, “*Consilio humana*,” 142–45; Procopius, *Anecdota* 30.34; Dooley, “Plague and Its Consequences,” 224.

118 Lee, “Environment, Epidemics,” 92–93. As a result, Chinese sources tend to be more concerned with noting an occurrence of epidemic disease rather than describing it *per se*.

119 Justinian, *Novella*, 77.

120 Markus, “Gregory the Great.”

121 Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 3.30.

122 Stoclet, “*Consilio humana*,” 137.

123 Discussed in detail in Meier, “Justinianic Plague,” 282–83.

way to new or rival cults: the mothers of those Türks whom the Byzantine emperor Maurice encountered in 591, for example, had been taught by “some Christians” (presumably monks or priests belonging to the Persian “church of the East”) that the way to fend off the plague was to tattoo the sign of the Cross on the foreheads of their children.¹²⁴ It is also noteworthy that the era of the dust-veil event of the mid 530s appears to have marked a point at which Buddhism made significant inroads into both Korea and Japan, while, in 590, an occurrence of epidemic disease in the northern Chinese capital of Chang’an led the Sui emperor Wendi to summon the Buddhist monk Xu Xiaoke to lecture on the Buddhist *Sutra* in the prime minister’s office.¹²⁵ Likewise, the purest distillation of late-antique apocalypticism would be found not in the writings of Pope Gregory the Great but rather in the emergent religion of Muhammad.

Conclusion: Disruption and Renewal

In 726, a volcano on the Greek island of Thera (Santorini) erupted on what would appear to have been a massive scale. This event was interpreted by the imperial authorities in Constantinople as a sure sign of divine displeasure, and informed the decision of the reigning emperor Leo III (r. 717–741 CE) to denounce as idolatrous the established veneration of images of Christ, Mary, and the saints known as “icons.” Yet the era of Byzantine “iconoclasm” that the edict of Leo inaugurated (which would persist to the ninth century), was not “caused” by the volcanic eruption on Thera: anxiety over the role of images in Christian worship had been mounting since the late seventh century, when their veneration had been denounced by the Muslim authorities in Damascus.¹²⁶ The eruption was simply one of a whole series of “nudge factors” that pushed imperial policy in a particular direction. Rather, the era of the iconoclast emperors would instead be informed by exogenous factors connected to climate change and disease at a more fundamental level in that these rulers were fortunate enough to reign over the empire of Constantinople at a time when the plague of the sixth century finally died away, allowing the population to begin to recover. As a result, from ca. 750, economic conditions would stabilize, and a sense of order was gradually restored. The same would be true across western Eurasia: both the Carolingian dynasty of Francia, which came to power in 751 and established itself as the dominant power in western Europe, and the ‘Abbāsīd rulers of the Islamic caliphate, who supplanted the Umayyads in a revolution in 750, would find that “the end of an epidemic could boost a new dynasty’s claims to legitimacy.”¹²⁷ Interestingly, the period most associated with the fading away of the early medieval plague pandemic was also associated with the consolidation of recast religious identities across central Eurasia, “including the Khazar conversion to Judaism in 740, the Uyghur conversion to Manichaeism in 763, and the proclamation of Buddhism

124 Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia*, 5.10.15.

125 Keys, *Catastrophe*, 175 and 182–83; Lee, “Environment, Epidemics,” 118.

126 See Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium*; Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 299–302.

127 Stoclet, “*Consilio humana*,” 144; Conrad, “Epidemic Disease,” 20n28.

as the state religion of Tibet under Khri Srong Lde Brstan (ruled 756–797 CE),” a phenomenon perhaps partly explicable, it has been suggested, by way of “gratitude to the Divine for the end of the punishment.”¹²⁸ To the east, the dismantling of the networks of long-distance trade by land associated with the decline of Türk power in the seventh century (and which would be compounded by Arab attacks on Central Asia and Tibetan insurgency in the eighth), also led to a reconfiguration of patterns of international trade between China and its neighbours, with a renewed emphasis on the Indian Ocean as a commercial conduit.¹²⁹

From Aachen to Constantinople and from the Bosphorus to Beijing, therefore, the eighth and ninth centuries would witness imperial consolidation and cultural renewal informed, to at least some extent, by changing demographic conditions which meant that rulers had more resources (both material and ideological) on which to draw. But, as both the processes of sixth-century dislocation and eighth-century restoration reveal, to appreciate the nature of the impact of climate change and disease on the global Early Middle Ages, one needs not only to avoid the temptation of causal reductionism but also to be alert to the structural characteristics of each of the societies that found themselves affected by the exogenous phenomena of the era, mindful of the fact that “endings” are also “beginnings.”¹³⁰ It is striking, for example, not only that the civilization of Teotihuacan appears to have been dealt a body blow by the medium-term consequences of the volcanic activity (probably) of the mid 530s, but also that it seems to have partly owed its original ascendancy to an earlier eruption in the first centuries CE, which had had similarly disruptive consequences for power relations among the peoples and polities of Mesoamerica.¹³¹ In dust it had originated, and to dust Teotihuacan returned.

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128 Schamiloglu, “Plague,” 307–8.

129 Hansen, *Silk Road*; and Preiser-Kapeller, *Jenseits von Rom*, 221–50.

130 Note, for example, the comments of Haldon et al., “Plagues, Climate Change.”

131 Carballo and Robb, “Lighting the World,” 14; Oppenheimer, *Eruptions*, 240–47.

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INTELLECTUAL CONNECTIVITY

Erik Hermans

THE HISTORICAL PANORAMA of the previous eighteen chapters demonstrates that all the regions of the early medieval globe were connected through trade, diplomacy, and war. Although they were not aware of this, merchants, diplomats, and soldiers interacted with each other in a framework that was partly influenced by the global processes of climate change and trade cycles. One aspect of human societies that has not come to the fore in the previous discussions of these processes is the history of intellectual discourse; and with good reason. At first glance, the texts and ideas of the educated elites are hardly the tissue that connected distant societies. Nevertheless, although they pale in comparison to the exchange of material goods, there were instances of the transmission of higher learning across cultural and linguistic boundaries. I will therefore complete this companion's exploration of early medieval connectivity by briefly presenting these remarkable cases of intellectual exchange. Before I do so, however, I will explain why higher learning did not diffuse as widely as material goods.

The Limited Diffusion of Higher Learning

In the early medieval period, like in any other period of human history, ideas travelled wherever people travelled. Since there were very few places of the globe that had not yet been settled by humans by the seventh century, it is fair to say that the early medieval dissemination of ideas was a global phenomenon. The same is true to a lesser extent for intellectual discourse, which is here broadly defined as a discourse of ideas that transcended immediate practical needs, such as for economic, administrative, or liturgical purposes. No clear-cut separation between different types of human knowledge exists, but they can all be placed on a spectrum that runs from the intuitive and practitioner's knowledge via technological knowledge to scientific and higher-order knowledge.¹ Here, I focus on the latter end of that spectrum. This chapter therefore does not include technological treatises and ideas, but it does discuss medical texts, since those were more closely related to philosophical debates in this period.²

Intellectual discussions occur in every human community, including illiterate or nomadic ones. In the early medieval world, tribal societies in regions like Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa, or North America must have known some kind of intellectual discourse,

¹ Renn, *Globalization of Knowledge*, 31–34; Crone, *Pre-industrial Societies*, 87–96; Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 90–92.

² For an overview of technological exchange in the medieval period, see Schäfer and Popplow, "Technology and Innovation."

in particular as part of literary oral traditions. However, intellectual debates tend to be more elaborate and institutionalized in complex, sedentary societies that have written traditions and educated elites. Between the sixth and the ninth centuries, such societies were located in Mesoamerica and in a geographical area that runs across Afro-Eurasia: between the Sahara Desert and Scandinavia at the western end, through Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent in the middle, and to the Japanese and Indonesian archipelagos at the eastern end. It is this latter region that contained centres of political or religious power where intellectual discourse was so elaborate that we can call them actual centres of learning. Moreover, as opposed to Mesoamerica, we are able to study some of the knowledge that Afro-Eurasian polities produced, because it has been transmitted to the modern era through manuscript copies in subsequent centuries.³

As in other historical epochs, the most distinct differences between early medieval civilizations are not socio-economic or political in nature. Phenomena such as social stratification, the power struggle between elites, armies, and ruling families or the mercantile practices at urban markets, for instance, all show large degrees of similarities between Silla Korea, Carolingian Europe, Tang China, the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, and other societies. While environmental and other exogenous factors may cause different social patterns to prevail across space and time, the most fundamental differences between groups of humans are found in the diachronic transmission of culture.⁴ Especially in the cultural and intellectual production of educated elites—traditionally known under the normative terms “high culture” or “higher learning”—are the most distinct attainments of a civilization to be found. Since higher learning is so tied to particular traditions, it is not readily transferrable across cultural boundaries. Generally speaking, there needs to be a conscious interest in another civilization for such knowledge to be imported across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Yet there were very few authors in the period 600–900 CE who had an objective interest in foreign civilizations. If any of the surviving historiographers describe distant cultures, they only do so whenever it is relevant to their own.⁵ The Early Middle Ages did not bring forth someone like the thirteenth-century Rashīd al-Dīn, who encompassed much of Afro-Eurasia in his writings, nor any equivalent of modern scholars who learn a foreign language out of ethnographic interests.⁶ As a result, even most members of the educated elite had only hazy conceptions of distant cultures.⁷ There never was anything that amounted to global awareness.⁸

3 For pre-modern intellectual traditions in the Americas, see Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*.

4 See, for instance, Renfrew, *Prehistory*, 97; Christian, “World Environmental History,” 138.

5 Kedar and Wiesner-Hanks, “Introduction,” 10; for some partial exceptions to this rule, see 11–12.

6 Kedar and Wiesner-Hanks, “Introduction,” 12; see also Park, *Chinese and Islamic*.

7 As an illustration of such awareness across the entire east–west axis of Eurasia, see the brief discussion of the snippets of information about Carolingians that reached the Chinese via the caliphate in Hodges, “Shadow of Pirenne,” 109, 123; and Chen, “Sources of Roman-Greek.”

8 Even the so-called “Age of Discovery” did not create global awareness among the elites of western Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Osterhammel, “Globalizations,” 96–97.

In short, the kind of demand that existed across the early medieval world for the import of material goods and commodities from distant civilizations did not exist for the import of learned texts and ideas. In early medieval Baghdad, there were, to put it simply, Chinese ceramic jars but no Chinese poems. Moreover, there currently are hardly any studies that discuss the intellectual history of the Early Middle Ages—or of any other pre-modern period—from a global point of view.⁹ A new field of global intellectual history has emerged in recent years, but most of its inquiries focus on the globalization of knowledge during the past few hundred years.¹⁰ Yet there are definitely traces of the global exchange of higher learning in the early medieval period as well.

Religious Epistemic Networks

Early medieval texts were never produced in a vacuum but always in so-called epistemic networks.¹¹ Intellectuals in such networks normally shared a similar education that was based on traditional canons of knowledge, and they generally communicated with each other in the same *lingua franca*. One could say that these epistemic networks are what defines a civilization, and, as such, they transcend political boundaries and defy strict geographical demarcation. Yet if one adopts the bird's-eye view of a global historian, then the largest epistemic networks that are discernable in Afro-Eurasia are the ecumenes of world religions, in particular Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity.¹² Due to the scriptural nature of these religions, there was always a certain level of intellectual connectivity within these ecumenes, since foundational texts of the religions in question circulated widely and were often studied and commented upon in the same language. *The Analects* and other texts of Confucius were studied in Chinese, the Sutras of Buddha in Sanskrit, the Qurʾān and the Hadith of Muhammad in Arabic and the Gospels of Jesus in Syriac, Greek, and Latin among other languages. By the seventh century, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity had already had a wide geographic spread for centuries, and they were still expanding. For example, Confucianism and Buddhism took root in Japan, while Nestorian Christians spread into China.¹³ Islam, on the other hand, witnessed both its genesis and its largest expansion between the seventh and ninth centuries. By the year 900, scholars of the Qurʾān could be found in cities as far apart as Cordoba and Kabul, which made the Islamic ecumene not less impressive than

⁹ The most recent exceptions to this rule are Renn, *Globalization of Knowledge*, and Dominguez, "World Literature."

¹⁰ See, for instance, the new journal *Global Intellectual History* (www.tandfonline.com/toc/rgih20/current), and the chapters in the book *Global Intellectual History* by Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (2013).

¹¹ Renn, *Globalization of Knowledge*, 38–40.

¹² The notion of "world religion" itself is problematized in detail by Masuzawa, *World Religions*.

¹³ For the expansion of Buddhism, see: Braarvig, "Spread of Buddhism"; Sen, "Spread of Buddhism." For the influx of Nestorian Christians to Central Asia and China, see Baum and Winkler, *Church of the East*; Johnson, "Silk Road Christians."

the Buddhist one, which stretched from Afghanistan to Java and Japan or the Christian one between China and Ireland.¹⁴

The intellectual connectivity within these global epistemic networks also transcended linguistic boundaries. In Islam, the connection with the holy language of Arabic is strongest, and hence the presence of Islamic learning almost always entailed the presence of knowledge of Arabic. In Christianity, the association with a holy language has always been least uniform, and the early medieval Christian ecumene was therefore polyglottic, with different communities using different liturgical languages, including Latin, Greek, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopic.¹⁵ Buddhist texts had been translated from Sanskrit into Chinese since ancient times, and this process continued into the eighth century, when they were translated into Tibetan.¹⁶ However, as the journey of Xuanzang and subsequent Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese scholars to the Sanskrit university of Nalanda in northern India indicate, the desire to go back to the original source language of Buddhist texts remained present.¹⁷ Furthermore, the circulation of texts within these ecumenes could be impressive. One Buddhist monk, Genbō (d. 746), is said to have brought 5,000 manuscripts with him from China to Japan. While that number may be an exaggeration, the surviving book catalogues from the ninth and tenth centuries do give testament to the incredible amount of imported texts available in early medieval Japan.¹⁸

Early medieval Eurasia can, in short, be considered an intellectual continuum due to the extensive diffusion of religious scholars within the largest religious ecumenes. Nevertheless, as remarkable as the circulation of a Buddhist knowledge between Nalanda and Nara or the simultaneous study of the Book of Psalms in Chang'an and Iona in Scotland is, this kind of connectivity is strictly speaking not cross-cultural. It is even more noteworthy when knowledge that was produced by the literate elite of one epistemic network reached the intelligentsia of another. Such instances were much rarer, but they did occur. For that we have to look at knowledge that was not religious in nature. Although the majority of texts that survive from the early medieval world contain or discuss religious scriptures, the history of early medieval learning is not identical to the history of early medieval religions. Sometimes the intellectual climate in religious institutions such as monasteries allowed for the production of knowledge that transcended the immediate needs of interpreting scriptures and organizing ceremonies and rituals for worship.¹⁹ Some secular histories written by ecclesiastical authors

14 For a good overview of the formation of Islamic civilization, see Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 207–30.

15 Biblical works were mostly translated into these languages from Greek; see Rigolio, "Greek Texts."

16 Kornicki, *Chinese Texts in East Asia*, 220; Bouchier, "Translation." For an overview of the texts translated into Tibetan, see Herrmann-Pfandt, *Lhan kar ma*.

17 Misra (*Nalanda*, I: 307–10) lists the foreign scholars who travelled to Nalanda.

18 Kornicki, *Chinese Texts in East Asia*, 134.

19 Hodgson (*Venture of Islam*, 158–59) argues that the most important role of organized religion in history was its unintended side effect of opening up new vistas of intellectual inquiry and creative expression.

in Byzantium are an example of this.²⁰ The production of “secular” knowledge could also emerge under favourable circumstances of political institutions.²¹ The centres of power in complex societies were often also centres of learning, such as the itinerant courts of the Carolingian kings and Japanese emperors, or those in the cities of Constantinople, Baghdad, and Chang’an. Courts, chanceries, and other bureaucratic institutions often facilitated the education of officials to fulfill the state’s administrative needs, such as the large group secretaries (*kuttāb*) in ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad.²² These institutional impulses gave rise to an educated elite who would then also produce texts on their own accord. “Urban” elites produced most of belletristic and scientific texts of this period, sometimes sponsored by political leaders who used the patronage of higher learning as a form of legitimization. The two largest polities, the Tang empire and the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, produced the largest amount of knowledge and texts. Among the various scriptoria and libraries of Chang’an was the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (Chinese: *hongwenguan*), which is said to have included more than 200,000 manuscript scrolls in the seventh century.²³ ‘Abbāsīd bibliomania is illustrated well by anecdotes that were deemed to be credible by contemporaries, such as the one about the historian al-Waqīdī, who is told to have owned 600 trunks of books, each hoisted by a pair of men.²⁴ Generally speaking, these elites wrote in the lingua franca of the religious ecumene that they were a part of. While most of this knowledge only circulated within one ecumene—often only within a small number of urban and religious centres—we know of a small number of remarkable instances of their cross-cultural transmission.

Cross-Cultural Transmission of Knowledge

Texts and ideas were transmitted across civilizational boundaries in regions where the religious ecumenes bordered and overlapped.²⁵ Knowledge produced on the outer fringes of Eurasia, like western Europe and Japan, never crossed such boundaries, but some of the texts produced in South Asia and West Asia did. There were, in particular, two pathways along which knowledge was transmitted cross-culturally: one leading from South Asia westward and the other from the eastern Mediterranean and West Asia eastward.

20 See, for example, Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, 457–87.

21 See also Walton, “Educational Institutions,” 116–18, 140–42.

22 Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 26–93.

23 Xiang, “Nālandā to Chang’an,” 207.

24 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 7.

25 This is a non-exhaustive survey of the intellectual connectivity of the early medieval globe rather than an in-depth discussion of the context in which ideas originated and flourished or analysis of the internal dynamics of certain intellectual traditions. I therefore do not claim to follow the specific approach of the fields of intellectual history, history of ideas, or the sociology of knowledge (see Grafton, “History of Ideas,” for a discussion of these different approaches).

From the Gangetic Plain of northern India, Buddhism had spread in Antiquity to places like Bamiyan and Balkh in what is now Afghanistan, which were by the seventh century lively centres of learning. Possibly by this route, south Asian knowledge reached the Iranian plateau and the Mesopotamian plain of modern Iraq. Two ancient collections of stories followed this path. The first one is the *Panchatantra*, a collection of animal fables, which was originally composed in Sanskrit in the fourth century BCE. In the second half of the sixth century, it was translated in the Sassanian empire into Middle Persian, and in the middle of the eighth century that version was translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa', who was connected to the court of the Al-Mansur, the second 'Abbāsid caliph.²⁶ The Arabic version, known under the title *Kalīla wa Dimna*, was soon considered a masterpiece of Arabic prose. After the early medieval period, the diffusion of these stories would become even more extensive, and between the tenth and the fifteenth century, they were translated into Syriac, Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, German, English, Old Slavonic, and Czech, reaching an audience that stretched from Iceland to Java.²⁷

Sometime between 750 and 900 CE, another story was translated into Arabic as the *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Būdasf*. Whether this text was translated from Middle Persian or Sanskrit and through what route it reached the caliphate is unknown, but what is certain is that these stories ultimately go back to ancient stories of the life of Buddha.²⁸ Before the end of the ninth century and possibly in Jerusalem, the Arabic text was translated into Georgian, which would be the basis of numerous translations in subsequent centuries.²⁹ In the later medieval period, it would be translated into Greek (previously attributed incorrectly to the eighth-century scholar John of Damascus), Hebrew, New Persian, Yiddish, Judaeo-Persian, and also into Latin, Castilian, and other European vernaculars. In the Christian tradition, this story became known as "Barlaam and Josaphat" and would have a very lively reception throughout Europe.³⁰

The city of Balkh continued to be an active centre of Buddhist learning long after the Arab armies had conquered it in the seventh century. From this city hailed the family of the Barmakids, who would produce a number of influential secretaries and governors under the early 'Abbāsid dynasty in Baghdad in the second half of the eighth century. The 'Abbāsid dynasty actively sponsored the translation of foreign texts into Arabic, and, due to the influence of the Barmakids, some of the first medical treatises to be translated were Sanskrit works, including the *Suśruta* of Vagbhata and the *Siddhasāra* of Ravigputa.³¹ Astronomical works were also translated, most notably the *Sindhind*, which would become an example for many subsequent astronomical handbooks in the Arabic tradition.³² More scientific works may have made their way from Sanskrit into Arabic,

26 De Blois, *Burzoy's Voyage*; Kristó-Nagy, *La Pensée d'Ibn al-Muqaffa'*, 109–48.

27 Kinoshita, "Translatio/n."

28 Forster, "Buddha in Disguise."

29 Forster, "Buddha in Disguise," 183.

30 Cordoni, *Barlaam und Josaphat*; Høgel, "Authority of Translators."

31 Bladel, "Bactrian Background," 76–77 and *passim*.

32 Pingree, "Sindhind"; Bladel, "Bactrian Background," 82–84.

possibly via Middle Persian intermediary texts, but almost all of this material is lost, because after 800 CE the translators and their political sponsors became more interested in texts from the lands to west of Baghdad.

The largest transmission of knowledge across a linguistic boundary during the Early Middle Ages was the Graeco-Arabic translation movement. After the 'Abbāsīd dynasty took over the caliphate in the middle of the eighth century and had Baghdad built as their new capital, they also adopted certain Sasanian imperial ideologies to appease non-Arab factions of political subjects and supporters. These ideologies included the translations of ancient texts into Arabic, the new language of intellectual discourse.³³ While translations from Sanskrit and Middle Persian were sponsored at first, the vast majority of texts were from Syriac and Greek. Most of these texts were late-antique treatises and commentaries of scientific nature, dealing primarily with Galenic medicine, Ptolemaic astronomy, Aristotelian logic, and Euclidean mathematics. During its formative phase, the Islamic civilization thus absorbed certain bodies of knowledge that had been studied by the intelligentsia of the Christian ecumene for centuries. Indeed, the majority of the population within the caliphate was probably Christian until the ninth century, and, more importantly, Syriac-speaking Nestorian Christians in Baghdad were the cultural brokers who made most of the Arabic translations.³⁴ As a result, the scientific traditions of the caliphate and Byzantium showed many similarities, which has caused modern scholars to speculate about the exchange of manuscripts between Baghdad and Constantinople.³⁵ The study of Aristotelian logic, moreover, was something that 'Abbāsīd intellectuals had in common with not only contemporary scholars in Constantinople but also those in Carolingian Europe. This remarkable similarity is not an indication of exchange of texts but of the fact that the Latin, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic intellectual traditions had each inherited the same intellectual tradition from the late-antique Roman empire.³⁶ The historiographic genre of world chronicles is another example of a Graeco-Roman intellectual tradition (going back to Eusebius in the third century) that was continued by Latin, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic speaking intellectuals in the early medieval period.³⁷

While the belletristic and the religious traditions of the Islamic civilization had their origin in Arab and Persian conventions and were thus different from those in the Christian world, the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement enabled the transmission of scientific texts and ideas from one ecumene to the other. In some cases, stories were also transmitted, such as those about Alexander the Great. Alexander legends had already circulated for centuries in multiple languages throughout the Mediterranean region. In

33 For a good overview of the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, see Gutas, *Greek Thought*.

34 Gutas (*Greek Thought*, 20–22) downplayed the extent to which ninth-century translators were indebted to the Syriac tradition. For a rehabilitation of that role of the intelligentsia of the Nestorian communities, see Tannous, “Between Byzantium and Islam,” 22–107.

35 Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 175–86; Mavroudi, “Language and Education,” 319–21.

36 Hermans, “Van Aken tot Bagdad.” For the argument that the Persian tradition should be added to his list, see Hermans, “Persian Origin.”

37 Marsham, “Universal Histories.”

the seventh century, they found their way into Syriac, into the Qurʾān itself, and during the eighth century, a version of the Greek novel *The Alexander Romance* was translated into Arabic.³⁸ Many Graeco-Roman texts and ideas were not only translated into Arabic but also had a very lively reception in the Islamic ecumene. Both the Alexander legends and Aristotelian dialectical notions, for example, continued to circulate in Arabic for many centuries after the Graeco-Arabic translation movement had ended.³⁹ However, some texts were transmitted even further eastward as early as the ninth century. Certain Galenic texts were translated into Tibetan, possibly in the eighth century, although a later date has also been proposed.⁴⁰ The most remarkable case concerns the transmission of astrology. As any form of divination, astrological knowledge had a special role for political leaders in practically all pre-modern societies since it provided an elaborate way of generating auspiciousness for specific undertakings and a sophisticated form of legitimation of dynastic rule. As a result, astrologers were employed in nearly every court across early medieval Eurasia, most importantly at those in Baghdad and Changʾan.⁴¹ In the eighth century, Buddhist astronomy was in vogue at both these courts, but so was one Graeco-Roman text.⁴² Among astrological texts that were translated into Arabic in the eighth century was Dorotheus' *Carmen Astrologicum* (first century). Parts of this text reached Changʾan in the ninth century—possibly through an intermediary translation that was transported by Manichean or Nestorian migrants—where they were incorporated into a Chinese horoscopic treatise known as the *Duli yusi jing*. Probably within the same century, Buddhist monks brought a manuscript of the *Yusi Jing* to Japan, where it would continue to be studied until the thirteenth century.⁴³

The eastward transmission of Dorotheus' *Carmen Astrologicum* is an exceptional case, but it does illustrate the fact that intellectual connectivity existed on a Eurasian scale. In other cases, such as the westward transmission of the *Panchatantra* or the eastward transmission of Aristotelian logic, the early medieval period formed a crucial translation moment that made it possible for these texts and ideas to be studied in a neighbouring ecumene for hundreds of years afterward. A scholar around the year 900 CE could, hypothetically speaking, travel across Eurasia from Nara to Aachen and conclude that all the epistemic networks he traversed were in some ways integrated with one another and that early medieval Eurasia was on some levels an intellectual continuum, just as it was a true continuum on every other level of human experience.

38 Bladel, "Alexander Legend"; Zuwiyya, *Alexander Literature*, 73–112.

39 For the Alexander legends, see Stoneman et al., *Alexander Romance*; Zuwiyya, *Alexander Literature*. For Aristotelian logic, see Wisnovksy, "Philosophical Commentary."

40 Yoeli-Tlalim, "Galen in Tibet."

41 Kotyk, "Buddhist Astrology"; Grenet, "Astrological Lore."

42 Bladel, "Indian Astronomy."

43 Mak, "Yusi Jing"; Mak, "Transmission of Buddhist Astral Science"; Mak, "East Syriac Christians."

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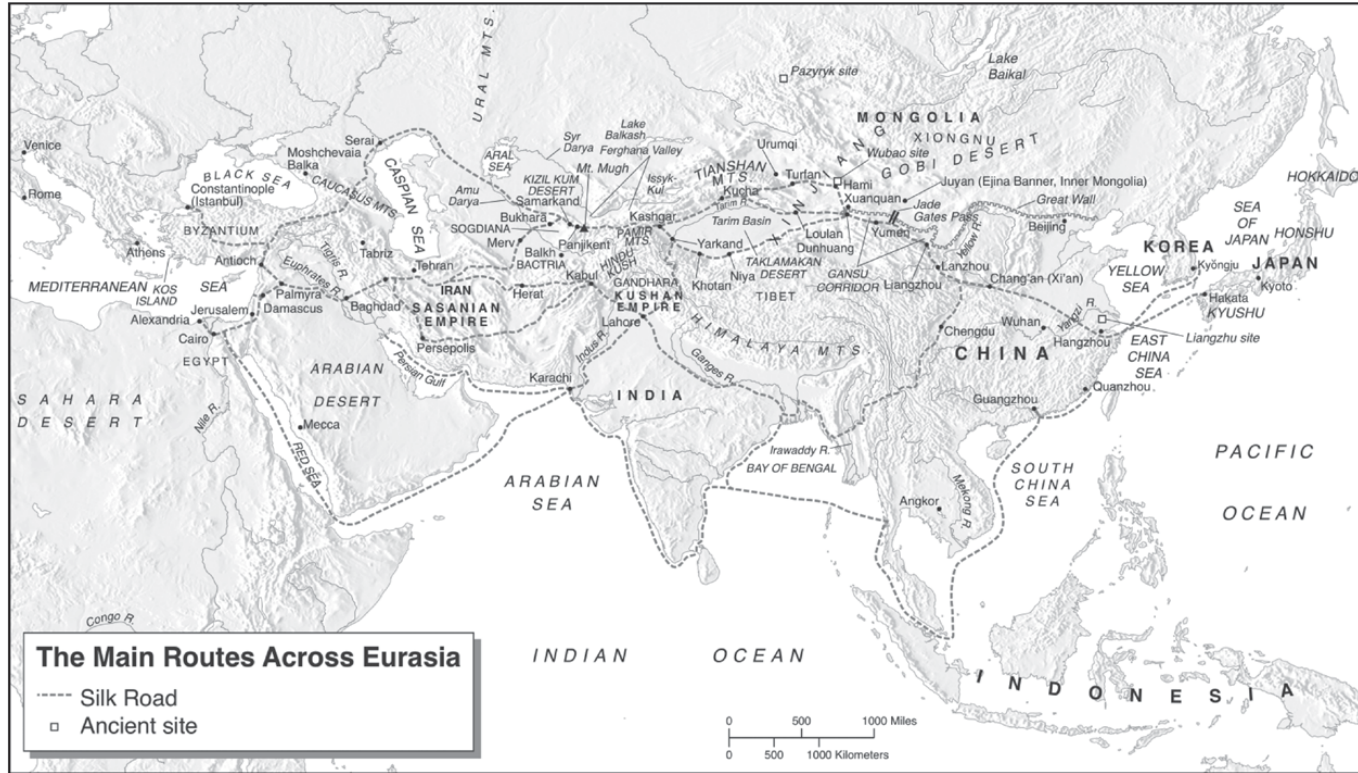
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Map 17. The main routes across Eurasia.
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