
The Interrelations of Societies in History

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THE INTERRELATIONS OF SOCIETIES IN HISTORY *

It has been long pointed out that the destinies of the various sections of mankind began to be interrelated long before the twentieth century, with its global wars and cold wars; or even the nineteenth century, the century of European world hegemony. Here we will study certain of the historical ways in which these destinies were intertwined; in this way we may distinguish more valid modes of tracing large-scale history and of comparing the societies involved in it, from a number of popular but unsound modes of trying to do so. I shall speak mostly of the ages before modern times, noting only briefly at the end of the paper certain crucial ways in which modern interrelations among human societies have been different from earlier ones.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL WORLD-IMAGE OF THE WEST

It would be a significant story in itself to trace how modern Westerners have managed to preserve some of the most characteristic features of their ethnocentric medieval image of the world. Recast in modern scientific and scholarly language, the image is still with us; indeed, all sorts of scholarly arguments are used to bolster it against occasional doubts. The point of any ethnocentric world image is to divide the world into moieties, ourselves and the others, ourselves forming the more important of the two. To be fully satisfying, such an image of the world must be at once historical and geographical. As in the Chinese image of the "Middle Kingdom" and the Islamic image of the central climes, so also in the Western image, most of this sleight-of-hand is performed through appropriate historical manoeuvres. Western Europe may be admitted to be small geographically, but all history is made to focus there.

But we must begin with the map. A concern with maps may seem trivial; but it offers a paradigm of more fundamental cases. For even in maps we

* This paper was delivered originally as a lecture at the downtown College of the University of Chicago in a series on "The Idea of Mankind", sponsored by the Committee for the Study of Mankind. It contains a sketch of ideas which the writer hopes to substantiate more fully; meanwhile, it constitutes an advance over the writer's "Hemispheric Interregional History as an Approach to World History" in *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, Vol. I (1954), pp. 715-723.

have found ways of expressing our feelings. We divide the world into what we call "continents". In the eastern hemisphere, where more than four-fifths of mankind still live, these are still the same divisions as were used by Medieval Westerners—Europe, Asia, and Africa. As we know, Europe west of the Russias has about the same population as historical India, now India and Pakistan; about the same geographical, linguistic, and cultural diversity; and about the same area. Why is Europe one of the continents but not India? Not because of any geographical features, nor even because of any marked cultural breach at the limits we have chosen. The two sides of the Aegean Sea have almost always had practically the same culture, and usually the same language or languages and even the same government. Much the same is true of the Black Sea and of the Ural Mountains.

Europe is still ranked as one of the "continents" because our cultural ancestors lived there. By making it a "continent", we give it a rank disproportionate to its natural size, as a subordinate part of no larger unit, but in itself one of the major component parts of the world. Incidentally, we thus also justify ourselves in evaluating it on a far more detailed scale than other areas. I believe it was the *New Yorker* magazine that published the "New Yorker's map of the United States", in which New York City, New England, Florida, and the West appeared as roughly comparable subdivisions. With our division of the world by continents, we allow ourselves a similar projection of our own interests. Italy is a country in the south of the "continent" Europe; India is a country (naturally "vast" and "mysterious") in the south of the "continent" Asia.

The *New Yorker* map of the United States went on to reflect the *New Yorker's* notions in the very sizes the several areas appeared to have on the map. Our Mercator world maps have done much the same thing for our Western world image. Some say the Mercator world map is so popular because it shows the correct *angles* essential for navigation (even though its *shapes* are almost as badly distorted as its areas). But if you use a map not for navigating but for placing and comparing at a glance different parts of the world, shapes and areas are more important than angles. Moreover, areas are more important than shapes, because they have cultural implications. What is objectionable about the Mercator world map in fact is not that it distorts the shape of North America, nor even that it shows Greenland so large—our conception of Greenland makes little difference. Rather, it is that it shows India so small, and Indonesia, and all Africa. (I call such a world map the "Jim-Crow projection" because it shows Europe as larger than Africa.)

The point is not, of course, simply that we make Europe big or put it in the upper center. Such matters in themselves might be as irrelevant as the fact that we put the prime meridian at Greenwich. What matters is the peculiar way our perceptions get distorted by the map projection (as they are by no prime meridian). The fortieth parallel north has a curious significance for our

world image. Historically, almost all the great centers of civilization have lain south of the fortieth parallel: all, that is, save Europe. Most of Europe lies north of that parallel. But it is precisely at about the fortieth parallel that the Mercator projection begins to exaggerate areas unconscionably. In consequence, that projection and others like it show Europe on a far larger scale than the Middle East, or India, or China. India does appear to the eye, on that projection, as a "country in Asia" on the order of, say Sweden in Europe. And it is possible to show on such a world map numerous details in Europe, towns and rivers that are famous among us, while India or Indonesia, say, are quickly filled up with only the most essential features—which, indeed, are all we have usually heard of.

No wonder, then, that despite all our awareness that Mercator distorts, and that many better projections are available, Mercator remains the most common form of world map outside geographers' classrooms. It confirms our predispositions. It flatters our egos. If we decide we must abandon Mercator because of its notoriety, we adopt a projection which may reduce the size of Greenland, but leaves India as diminutive as ever, compared to Europe; for instance, Van der Grinten, used by the National Geographic Society. Yet what we really want is to face the world as it actually is, not as our Western self-esteem would like to picture it. We may study our own Europe in more detail than other areas—on appropriate separate pages of the atlas. But when we look at the world as a whole—when we look at mankind as a whole—we want our own parts of it to fall into place so that we can see ourselves in true proportion. We need an equal-area world map for any purposes for which we need a world map at all.

THE HISTORICAL WORLD-IMAGE OF THE WEST

So much for our geographical paradigm. An idea of world history is much less tangible than a map of the world. But much the same points can be made about the Western image of world history. Here too the very terms we allow ourselves to use foster distortion. We aim to overcome any parochial outlook, but so long as we do not radically overhaul our historical categories and our notions of the structure of the historical world, we find ourselves dragged back by older preconceptions the moment the center of our attention shifts to other concerns.

We know how the traditional story runs: history began in the "East"—in Mesopotamia and Egypt (but not in Paradise, still further east, as the medieval Westerners had said); the torch was then passed successively to Greece and Rome and finally to the Christians of northwestern Europe, where medieval and modern life developed. During the Middle Ages, Islâm temporarily was permitted to hold the torch of science, which properly belonged to the West,

until the West was ready to take it over and carry it forward. India, China, and Japan also had ancient civilizations but were isolated from the mainstream of history and “contributed” still less to it (that is, to Western Europe). In modern times Western Europe expanded over the rest of the world, so that Islâm and India and China have ceased to be isolated, and have entered the orbit of the ongoing Western Civilization, now becoming a world civilization.

In this story, there are two key notions. There is a “mainstream” of history, which consists of our own direct antecedents. This includes all West-European history since it became civilized, of course; and, before that time, selected periods from areas to the southeast: Greek history till the time of the Roman empire (but not since—the Byzantines do not count as mainstream); and the Near East till the rise of the Greeks, but not since. Note that this conception of “mainstream” is not identifiable with the history of lands of cultural creativity, or times of intensity of historical change. The “mainstream” of history, in the traditional image, runs through northwestern Europe in the Dark Ages of the Merovingians—although everyone knows that the Byzantines and the Muslims (and the Indians and the Chinese) were far more civilized then. The “mainstream” of history is simply our own closest historical antecedents.

In fact, all the lands of the “mainstream” are sometimes identified with the “West”. Classical Greece is called “Western”, though Byzantine Greece is often included in the “East”. This brings us to the second key notion which allows us to construct a world history in which our own cultural ancestors hold most of the attention. All the other civilizations of the Eastern Hemisphere are lumped together under the heading “East”, “Orient”. This concept in history is the equivalent of the concept “Asia” in geography. It enables us to set up our West as conceptually equivalent to all the other civilized regions taken together—the “East”; just as the European peninsula is detached from the Eurasian landmass and made equivalent to all the rest of that landmass taken together—“Asia”. Apart from Eurasia and the northern part of Africa (the latter is, of course, included in the “East”, though Morocco is west of Spain), the more distant parts of the world were relatively sparsely inhabited and for the most part not highly civilized; their history does not force itself on our attention. Hence such a conception of Eurasia allows us to erect a classic ethnocentric dichotomy in the main part of the world—ourselves and the others, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Barbarians, “West” and “East”. Since by definition the “mainstream” of history runs through the “West”, by the same definition the “East” is isolated and static; hence the West, already appearing as one half of mankind, is made the more important half also.

One of the most curious features of this modern Western ethnocentrism has been its superimposition on all the other ethnocentrisms of the world, generally compounding the confusion. Muslims or Hindus have tended to accept modern Western conceptions as indiscriminately scientific; they have commonly

accepted their geographical and historical terms from the West, and the implications that follow from them. Sometimes the Western conceptions prove convenient, as when an Egyptian, identifying himself as "oriental", claims spiritual superiority to the West on the ground that Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius were all also "Orientals"; or, accepting the Western conception of "Africa" as a continent, finds an excellent excuse, as an "African", to meddle in Sub-Saharan politics without looking imperialistic. Sometimes the Western conceptions prove less convenient. I found displayed on the wall of an ardent Muslim in a government office in Cairo a map of the Muslim world, showing how widespread is Islam. But the map was a French one, drawn on the Mercator projection, and consequently drastically minimized the area of Islam as compared with Europe. The official was so used to the Mercator projection that he had not noticed this case of what might be called official imperialism.

Now just as the Mercator projection has been criticized so much that everyone is aware that it distorts, so the Western historical world image has been criticized; most of us are uneasily aware that "the East" is more important than we had thought. But just as most people think of Greenland as the best example of Mercator's distortion, failing to see just where the distortion is most misleading, and why certain related projections are just as bad, so it is rare for one to see the full implications of the distortions in the Western picture of world history, and to judge soundly of the various attempts to improve on them. Jim-Crow world maps continue to be the usual maps in newspapers, magazines, and general books; and few protest. Similarly, one or another modification of the Western world-historical image still underlies most discussions of mankind. This is true, unfortunately, even on the scholarly level, for some of the presentations of world history that try hardest to escape the traditional pattern still show its distortive influence.

THE CONTINUITY AMONG THE REGIONS OF THE EURASIAN HISTORICAL COMPLEX IN PRE-MODERN TIMES

I must limit myself here to discussing the major civilized regions of the Eastern Hemisphere. The overwhelming majority of mankind—until the last two centuries—lived within the region I am including. It was in a zone of Afro-Eurasian lands extending from Atlantic to Pacific, but chiefly north of the equator, that most of those societies were to be found, before modern times, which had the developed agricultural and urban life which carried with them density of population. It is becoming conventional to articulate this Afro-Eurasian zone of civilization into four main nuclear regions, which we may call Europe, the Middle East, India, and the Far East of China and Japan. Such a division makes a good deal of sense from about 1000 BC on, at least,

down to about 1800 of our era. Each of these regions presents a considerable continuity over some three thousand years of cultural development. More precisely, in each of these regions there was a core-area with reasonably persistent traditions, from which cultural influences have radiated more or less continuously into a wide surrounding region.

We must place these areas with greater precision, as we will have much to say of them. The core-area of what may be called Europe was the northern shores of the Mediterranean, from Anatolia to Italy especially. It had a Greek (and, later, Greco-Latin) culture which pervaded increasingly the lands to the north; but the Mediterranean lands remained economically and culturally dominant over the more northern ones, on the whole, from the time of the Minoans to the end of the Middle Ages. The core of the Middle East was the Fertile Crescent and the Iranian Plateau, to which lands north and south from Central Eurasia to Yemen and East Africa looked for cultural leadership, as did increasingly even Egypt, despite its distinct roots in its own past, and North Africa, and eventually all the Sudan. The great cultural languages of the Middle East were of the Semitic and Iranian families; though the particular Semitic and Iranian languages changed, much cultural lore was carried over from one period to the next. In the vast domain of Indic tradition east and south from the Hindu-Kush range, the Indus and Ganges valleys formed a somewhat similar core; there the Sanskrit and Pali languages developed, which became classical as far away as Cambodia and Java. Finally, the Hoang-Ho and Yangtze valleys in China formed a fourth creative core-area, from which cultural influences spread to an ever-increasing distance in all directions, within a constantly expanding China and beyond it to such lands as Japan and Vietnam.

Western scholars, at least since the nineteenth century, have tried to find ways of seeing this Afro-Eurasian zone of civilization as composed of distinct historical worlds, which can be fully understood in themselves, apart from all others. Their motives for this have been complex, but one convenient result of such a division would be to leave Europe, or even Western Europe, an independent division of the whole world, with a history that need not be integrated with that of the rest of mankind save on the terms posed by European history itself. But such attempts, if pressed consistently, leave us with a false notion of both world history and even European history. For even among the four great nuclear regions, the cleavages were not decisive enough to sustain such an interpretation. A brief survey of some of the more obvious cleavages will enable us to assess their significance.

If one tried to group these great cultural regions so as to divide the whole of the Afro-Eurasian historical complex into two portions (which is not often seriously attempted), the least useful division would be one in which Europe formed one portion, the "West", and the other three formed a second portion, the "East"; for the cleavage between Europe and its nearest neighbors was

unusually slight. The lands north of the Mediterranean were always very closely linked with those of the Fertile Crescent and Iran. I have listed the Anatolian peninsula (the western half of the present Turkish Republic) as part of Europe, since it was one of the chief formative centers of Greek culture, and has always shared the fortunes of the Balkan peninsula; but it is commonly listed as part of the Middle East, and not entirely without reason. The Mediterranean Basin formed a historical whole not only under the Roman Empire but before and since; even at the height of the Middle Ages a land like Sicily brought together creatively Greek, Arab, and Latin. Greek thought became an integral element in the Middle Eastern tradition, while Middle Eastern religion had a central place in European life.

A somewhat sharper division existed between Europe and the Middle East on the one hand and the Indic lands on the other. Greeks and Arabs, Latins and Persians, have had much the same reaction to India, in medieval times, finding it alien to a degree they have not found each other alien. The Hindu-kush and the Baluchistan desert formed a more serious barrier than the Taurus. Yet even so the constant thriving trade between the Middle East and India was reflected in important cultural exchanges, which reinforced the fact of a partly common background. For, long before the coming of the Indo-Europeans assured a common origin to the languages and myths of India, Iran, and Greece, the Indus Valley civilization had been closely linked with that of Mesopotamia.

The greatest breach in continuity was between China on the one hand and the Indian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean lands on the other. The Himalayas were more effective even than the Hindu-kush. Until modern times, direct contact was usually limited to mercantile expeditions. Alexander invaded both Greece and the Punjab; the Turk, Timur, campaigned in Russia and on the Gangetic plain; but though Timur dreamed of China, he could scarcely have reached it. Yet the Mongol armies at one point mastered much of China and at the same time won victories in Germany, in Iran, and on the Indus. As we know, Buddhism, originating in India, colored deeply the life of China and Japan; while numerous important inventions, among them gunpowder, the compass, paper, and printing, apparently came at various times from China to the Middle East and so to India and Europe.

As Eurasian history is studied, it becomes clear that these interrelations were not purely external, accidental cultural borrowings and influences among independent societies. They reflect sequences of events and cultural patterns shading into each other on all cultural levels. The four nuclear regions are imperfect historical abstractions. All regions formed together a single great historical complex of cultural developments.

Till modern times, the four core-areas were the most creative centers; but there were always lesser creative centers beyond them, such as Tibet; and the core-areas themselves cannot always be taken as units. Very early the cultural

traditions of the western and eastern Mediterranean regions began to be distinguished, till finally Greek and Latin, Orthodox and Catholic, developed relatively independently of each other. Iran and Central Eurasia often seem to have had their own history apart from the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. Northern and southern India presented a major contrast to each other. Finally, there is no point where the sort of differences that existed between the great regions could be decisively distinguished from the sort of differences that existed between particular nations. Yet all our modern serious attempts at understanding world history are based on the assumption of a series of distinct societies, distinct culture worlds, each with its own inner unity and with only external relations to the others. Universalizing efforts, such as that of Ranke, are only seeming exceptions, based on optical illusions which made Europe seem the world, and all other regions isolated and parochial.

As we consider the origins of the great civilizations, it will become evident both why it is impossible to draw any sharp lines within the Afro-Eurasian historical complex, and why none the less historians constantly try to draw such sharp lines. As we know, literate culture arose very nearly at the same time, but in different (though usually urban) forms, in the Indus, the Tigris-Euphrates, and the Nile valleys and probably somewhat later in the Hoang-ho and other less independent places such as Crete. This process seems to have had a common, interdependent development at least from the Indus to the Aegean; that is, in the areas which became the subsequent cores of the Indian, Middle Eastern, and European traditions. Some sort of Neolithic life had been widespread for some time; when once it crystallized into urban, literate forms in one place, it did so in many; and then rapidly spread over wide regions. It was only when developing civilization had come to a certain point—at about the same time in the main centers of the Afro-Eurasian zone—that the great regional traditions can come to be distinguished. They grew out of a relative breakdown of the local cultural traditions in a more cosmopolitan setting, into which many local strains had intermingled, from the Aegean to the Indus valley. The distinction among the different great regions was secondary, and based largely on accidents not only of geography but of history, even from the start.

This point is supported by the fact that in the marginal areas, such as Central Eurasia, where influences from the several core-areas overlapped, the culture cannot be reduced to a mixture of those of the main cultural regions. Commonly, all areas had their own traditions reaching back into Neolithic times, and forming directly an integral part of the broader Eurasian cultural whole. The French have emphasized this in the case of ancient Gaul; it is equally true of Malaysia or of Central Eurasia. In the Oxus-Jaxartes valleys, no doubt Semitic-Iranian influences had the greatest sway of any from outside; the writing systems came from the Fertile Crescent, for instance. For long periods, again, the Oxus-Jaxartes region was linked with northern India

both politically and to a large degree in religion, literature, and the arts. Buddhism flourished there (it was from there that it came most readily to China). Chinese influence was strong recurrently, not only when the area was under Chinese political domination. Even Hellenism flourished there for a period. Yet the history of the Oxus-Jaxartes basin possesses its own continuity over time; it cannot be read simply as a function of the history of the several great cultural regions. Moreover, the historical context in which its history makes sense can be nothing less than the whole Eurasian civilized zone.

THE PLACE OF SUPRA-NATIONAL SOCIETIES IN THE AFRO-EURASIAN COMPLEX

Hence the more sophisticated have tried to make not permanent regions as such, but supra-national societies, defined purely historically and so limited in time as well as space, the desired independent historical worlds. It is in this sense that the phrase, "the Western world", has meaning, if it has any serious meaning at all. This attempt has its own limitations. Such societies are conceived as held together by some element of conscious solidarity, perhaps through spiritual presuppositions or through creative style. They are distinct "worlds" in the sense of realms of communication on the highest cultural level. Spengler's is the most famous of the many attempts at distinguishing such societies. Toynbee made a rather half-hearted attempt to do the same, with his doctrine of separate "intelligible fields"; but the weight of his material forced him to go beyond the usual limits, and in effect he abandons the attempt. If we examine Toynbee's work more closely we find that his alleged "intelligible fields" are not really independent intelligible fields, nor even the most important intelligible fields of his own historical study. In the end what is most important in this system comes to be the development of the religions, and he shows the religions developing right across the lines of his nineteen civilizations, which he began by supposing to be independently intelligible fields. In the end most of his work makes no sense except in terms of one large intelligible field—the whole Afro-Eurasian historical complex, in which the several generations of his "societies" are variously related to each other.

This is necessarily so; for important as the various supra-national societies were as frameworks of historical life, they overlapped each other, and even so they did not exhaust the field among them. They were superimposed on a continuum of historical life which recognized no insuperable geographical boundary anywhere between the two oceans. Commercial life, the patterns of urban and rural relations, and the spread of technology, particularly military technology, commonly evolved in relative disregard of the boundaries of religious or literary traditions; such matters were often determined more by

local conditions on the one hand and by the general cultural level of the civilized zone on the other.

When historians speak of civilizations or societies, in such connections, they are usually referring primarily to certain limited, if very important, aspects of civilized life. Normally, before modern times, a given area was indeed associated, at any given time, much more closely with some neighboring areas than with others. These associations have been of three main types, political, literary, and religious. The political associations have usually been relatively transient, and only rarely come into consideration here except as reinforced by literary and religious associations.

In the early days of civilization, each language area seems to have developed with relative autonomy from every other; but fairly early certain languages came to be recognized as unusually rich in cultural values, and were cultivated as cultural languages even by peoples which did not use them as the vernacular. Thus Sumerian and Babylonian came to be classical languages for the Fertile Crescent and to some degree for Iran; all the peoples whose literate elite paid some degree of deference to that classical tradition formed in some sense a single civilization. They possessed common terms of reference and common standards, and sometimes the recognition of a classical literary tradition carried with it varying degrees of common legal forms, common political ideals, common artistic patterns. This became especially true by the end of the first millennium BC, when local cultural traditions within the main geographical regions had been largely submerged.

But by the Middle Ages, the rise of the religions of salvation had established bonds which were as strong as, or even stronger than, those of literary tradition; such bonds sometimes cut right across the lines of literary association. In the regions from Europe to India, religious affiliation became more important than literary, and peoples came to be linked together as Christian or Zoroastrian or Buddhist, rather than as using Greek or Cuneiform or Sanskrit. In China and the Far East, religious affiliation was eventually outbalanced by literary affiliation, and Chinese society was ruled in the end in the name of the Confucian classics rather than of Buddhist or Taoist faith. In any case, on the "high cultural" level most educated men found themselves associated with a given lettered tradition, "literary" or religious, normally to the exclusion of any others.

The importance of such groupings for the development of human life can hardly be overestimated, particularly for that of the ideal and the imaginative life, religion, art, belles-lettres, and even law and political and social institutions. To some degree even the life of the peasant was moulded by the ideals set forth in the lettered tradition cultivated by the educated élite of his area. But it is not because of any implications for peasant life, but because of literary and philological implications, that historians have concentrated attention on them. They are indeed the central concern of a humanistic historian.

But in the course of giving them almost exclusive attention, many historians have misinterpreted them; they have absolutized these lettered traditions into "historical worlds" to an illegitimate degree.

Such societies were never closed wholes; there were always fields of activity, even important fields, that were but superficially moulded by the central tradition in question. As in the case of the geographical regions on which they were often based, there were always territories where two or more traditions competed, and actual life, even on the high cultural level, was a synthesis of diverse elements. These were not anomalies, as our theorists have tended to count them. Indeed, different sorts of lettered tradition mingled in different degrees in given societies. Thus it is possible to regard Byzantine life on the one hand as a continuation of the ancient Greek culture and on the other hand as part of a Christian complex, wider in area, but more restricted in time. Revealingly, there existed lesser lettered traditions of the same basic sort, which had less extensive effects, but cut across other lines. Thus the society formed by the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophers, clinging to a particular strand of the Greek literary tradition, cut across the lines formed by Christianity, Islâm and Judaism; these philosophers lived lives largely moulded by their common philosophical heritage, and often had more in common with each other than with any of their respective religious groups. More tenuous, but perhaps even more important, was the interregional tradition of natural science, originating in Babylonian and Greek writing, taken up in Sanskrit and later in Arabic, and transmitted still later to Chinese and Latin—a vigorous tradition of wide implications, which cut across all the main cultural lines of the Afro-Eurasian zone.

Islâm was the community which succeeded perhaps most strongly in building for itself a total society, demarcated sharply from all culture before and beyond its limits. Though it appeared relatively late in Eurasian history, as the religions go, it developed its own system of comprehensive law—where the Christian communities took over pagan Roman law. It created its own classical literatures, with only a limited reminiscence of earlier Middle Eastern traditions. Social organization, economic patterns, the arts, all carried an unmistakable Islâmic coloring. Moreover, though the Islâmic society was far the most widespread among its contemporary medieval societies, yet an unusually strong social solidarity prevailed among Muslims, from Morocco to Java and from Kazan to Zanzibar.

Yet even so, on investigation, it is clear that Islâm as a lettered tradition cannot be treated as a distinct historical world, an exclusive intelligible field. The Middle-Eastern origins of the Islâmic society are relatively obscure; we know too little about life in the Fertile Crescent and Iran in the immediately preceding centuries. But it seems likely that one central phenomenon of early Islâm had gotten well under way in the last generations of Sâsânî rule: the centering of power in urban mercantile communities, under the lead of an

absolute monarch who could override and break down the locally rooted power of the landed nobility and gentry. The rise of the late Sâsânî sects and that of the classical Muslim sects both seem to be closely related to this situation. We are learning that we cannot really make out what was going on in early Islâmic political and religious life without a much fuller understanding of the Sâsânî life which preceded it. Moreover, the orthodox faith of Islâm itself, as it was created in the course of the first two or three Muslim centuries, cannot be understood simply as a fulfilment of the vision of Muḥammad; that vision could have been fulfilled in innumerable other ways, or indeed (as might have seemed most likely) reduced to a merely political ideology, to wither away as the Arab ruling class became assimilated. The being of Islâm must be explained in terms of the aspirations of Syrian Christian monks and Mesopotamian Jewish zealots—aspirations which gave to early Muslim converts their very notion of what a religion ought to be, and which they fulfilled in an unprecedented way.

When later the Islâmic society expanded over half the Afro-Eurasian civilized zone, the persisting regional configuration of that zone reasserted itself despite all Muslim solidarity. By the sixteenth century, at the latest, Islâm in eastern Europe, Islâm in the Middle East proper, and Islâm in India were clearly pursuing their separate paths. Already when Bâbur, founder of the Mogul empire, entered India, he seems to have found the local Muslims as alien to him as their Hindu friends; and despite the continued reliance of his descendants on Middle Eastern and Central Eurasian personnel, and despite a strong puritanical force within Indian Islâm which rejected its Indian-ness and eventually won over the Mogul emperor himself, Islâmic society in India under the Moguls increasingly developed its own Indian institutional framework and cultural patterns, and formed a relatively independent society. East-European Islâm, under the Ottoman empire in Anatolia and the Balkans, evolved in a like direction. The Ottoman empire, like the Mogul, reversed in its own area the long-standing trend of Islâm toward decentralization and toward reduction of the social role of political authority; it built up enduring central institutions, religious, legal, and political, thought quite different ones from those of the Moguls. But the heart of Ottoman life remained its European center—the formerly Greek lands of Anatolia and the Balkans. The Arab areas south of the Taurus remained only half-subdued dominions, sharing relatively little in the creative sides of Ottoman life; 'Irâq, at least, tied its sympathies to the third great Muslim empire of the time, the Safavî empire of Iran.

Indeed, not only in these three empires, expressing the traditions of the three core-areas of previous millenniums, but throughout the Afro-Eurasian zone, Islâm was a microcosm of interregional civilization, containing within its society all the types of relationships which had formerly been carried on as between the several regions into which it had spread. In Malaysia, Islâm

had powerful effects; it overlay the earlier Indic traditions with the hemisphere-wide Muslim allegiance, and replaced the earlier Indic-type literary inspiration with a new inspiration expressed in a new alphabet, if not a new tongue. Yet even in their new faith, the Malaysians were inspired largely by *Indian* Islâm as they had been by Indian Hinduism; and their new literary traditions, so far as these did break with the old (which was not entirely), derived also from the mixture of Persian and Arabic heritage which prevailed in southern India. More important, Islâm in Malaysia (sometimes a bit to the scandal of orthodox Muslims there and elsewhere), rarely took on, before quite modern times, the rigorous severity which from time to time purged Islâmic life in its more central regions; Islâm for Malaysia was a new and more universal mysticism, and was taught as such by the heirs of the Indic *gurus*. In fact, Islâm for Malaysia was the natural consequence of its position in the Afro-Eurasian zone as a whole. Malaysia lay at the crossroads of the Southern Seas. Its higher cultural life, from the time when civilization first came there, was ultimately adopted from the life of its ports. Yet these on the one hand remained somewhat apart from the life of the interior—never deeply rooted in local traditions, and on the other hand naturally remained open to the broad currents of culture from throughout the Southern Seas. When the dominant culture of merchants in those waters was Hindu or Buddhist, the port cities became Hindu and Buddhist, and eventually the hinterland followed them. As interregional trade gradually increased in volume and range, the Middle Eastern ports came to have a more pivotal role in the trade of all the Southern Seas; it was then the Middle Eastern culture which increasingly prevailed in the ports of those seas—especially in Malaysia. By the later Middle Ages this meant Islâm. But the fundamental pattern of Malaysian life persisted; and it can be understood only in the context of the Afro-Eurasian civilized zone as a whole.

It has become clear that historical life, from early times at least till two or three centuries ago, was continuous across the Afro-Eurasian zone of civilization; that zone was ultimately indivisible. The various regions had their own traditions; important social bodies arose, sometimes within a regional framework, sometimes cutting across regional life, which moulded much of the cultural life of their constituents. But all these lesser historical wholes were imperfect wholes. They were secondary groupings. Local civilized life could go on without full participation in any of them; some of the most creative of historical activities, such as that of natural science, cut right across their boundaries. The whole of the Afro-Eurasian zone is the only context large enough to provide a framework for answering the more general and more basic historical questions that can arise.

THE AFRO-EURASIAN COMPLEX AS A CONTEXT OF INTERREGIONAL CHANGE

At the same time it will have become increasingly clear that the Afro-Eurasian civilized zone was not a static historical context. It had its own characteristics as a set of interrelations. The several civilized regions formed a persistent historical configuration, in which each region had its typical place, its repeatedly typical relationships to the others. This interregional configuration, then, even while maintaining its key characteristics, constantly changed as to the detailed manner of its interrelationships. The civilized zone as a whole had its own history.

Throughout the millennia, resources of information and technique accumulated in each region and sooner or later found their way throughout the Afro-Eurasian zone. The sources of wealth available for interregional trade constantly increased as new areas were drawn in. Such cumulative growth meant that possibilities open to later generations were markedly different from those open to earlier ones. This accumulation was especially important in the case of the technique of travel and of warfare. The invention of the horse-chariot changed, in the immediate event, the relationship of people to people; more importantly, it seems to have changed the nature of distance itself, and launched the first empires. A like result came from the advent of the armed and mounted horseman, in whose presence—and notably in Central Eurasia—distance shrank still further. Related to these changes, of course, was the rise of nomadic herding as an ever dangerous complement and challenge to agriculture. A constantly more effective use of gunpowder brought further decisive changes in warfare which men had to adapt to in most Afro-Eurasian regions within centuries after its primitive beginnings in China, and which almost everywhere seem to have had effects on the concentration of political power. There was a gradual improvement of ship-building and of marine charting in both major sections of the Afro-Eurasian chain of seas which led from the northwest Atlantic and the Mediterranean through the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea. The invention of the compass in China and its dramatic use in Western Europe for ocean travel formed only the most striking of the changes in navigation. Not merely in war and commerce, but in every field the constant piling up of changes petty in themselves broadened the range of cultural activity, and so the number of points at which various cultures could be important to each other: Chinese art fashions could not have been so important to Persian and Indian painters as they were, had there not been the discovery of numerous subtle pigments and of the technique of book illumination, to say nothing of paper itself.

Even in the realm of the mind, interregional conditions altered significantly. Certainly the technical invention of paper in China and its transmission to the other regions had important intellectual results. Less “technical” was

the invention of the monastic life—of an order of men detached from normal social connections, eminently mobile, and yet specialized in the highest intellectual or spiritual discoveries of their society. Such men made perfect long-range missionaries; when the Afro-Eurasian zone came to be permeated with them, there could arise a level of interregional contact never possible when the chief agents of intercultural contact were tired businessmen. Buddhism, Christianity, and Manicheanism all took full advantage of this mobility of their religious specialists. But perhaps more important than the invention of monasticism—though not unrelated to it—was the general development of large-scale systems of personal orientation, the historic religions, which with or without monks had an almost universal tendency to proselytize. Particularly in the case of Islâm, at last, such religion transcended the purely personal level and carried with it direct social initiative, moving toward the establishment of a total society on an unprecedented, hemisphere-wide basis.

One sort of cumulative trend, to which most of the tendencies already mentioned contributed, was of singular importance: the continuous expansion of the Afro-Eurasian zone as a whole; that is, of the area in which urban-dominated civilization was able to spread its commercial and political domination. Of special importance in this process were innovations such as the invention of the mould-board plow in northern Europe or the adaptation of the camel to the Sahara. These helped to expand the area of effective agricultural exploitation or of major commercial intercourse, and not only helped to change the internal balance of population and economic power within a given region but eventually changed the role of particular regions in the Afro-Eurasian configuration as a whole. Many at least minor adaptations in agricultural technique had to be made wherever agriculture and cities were to find new terrain; and these were in fact repeatedly made.

Both through such inventions and in many other ways that led to expansion, all the regions contributed to the continuous extension of civilization, and this expansion became a basic determinant in the fate of them all by shaping the sort of world they were to exist in. Sheer size of the interconnected zone was important in itself, determining the availability of total human resources at any given time; but still more important was the multiplying of the historical components in Afro-Eurasian development; for one thing, the variety in the regions contributing to it. The historical significance of the unbroken chain of trade that passed through the Afro-Eurasian chain of seas from Atlantic to Pacific was very different in different times according to the area of urbanization achieved. Access to the sea routes had a higher value, for instance, when Malaysia had become itself an active commercial area, and not a mere way station. The significance of the Central Eurasian steppe changed likewise. The constant expansion not only brought in new peoples, widening the scope of Afro-Eurasian commerce, but by altering the proportion of the urbanized area to the rest of the hemisphere, it changed the position of the remaining

more distant peoples vis-à-vis the civilizations. In particular this was the case with the Central Eurasian nomads and other unsettled peoples, increasingly limited in their range (though this fluctuated) and in their independence from urban influences. Owen Lattimore, in the *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, has indicated how parallel were the nomadic and the agricultural evolutions, and how in time the latter impinged ever more on the former. Thus in numberless ways the cultural and economic possibilities in each era depended on the extension of the Afro-Eurasian civilized zone in the whole eastern hemisphere. The whole of that expansion had effects greater than any of its parts.

OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE AFRO-EURASIAN ZONE

The changes effected in the interregional configuration of historical relationships in these various ways not only were large; they interlocked. Since the elements of the configuration were interdependent, any given changes were likely to lead to new ones, and the total course of all these changes forms a single story. In the sketch that follows we can see some of the main lines of that story, and its most important turning points. These are matters of the development of interregional relations, and so not necessarily the main events of human history as such, but in fact the development of the Afro-Eurasian interregional configuration involved directly some of the most significant aspects of the history of its various regions; hence the sketch is rather like a brief world history. At any rate, it is closer to a true world history than is the traditional historical world image of the West, with which it may be mentally compared.

Very early the expansion of the area of civilization took on a fundamental importance. The early isolated river-valley civilizations, islands in a sea of barbarians, were in touch with each other at best through tenuous long-distance trading; yet if it is true that one important feature they had in common was certain processes of working metals, and if in the very search for those rare metals their traders and rulers forced an expansion of the civilized patterns into their hinterlands, then it is this requirement common to them all that led in turn to a new condition which determined the fate of them all. For in time this came to depend on the fate of larger regions of civilization. Only in such regions was the cosmopolitanism of the Amarna age possible, such as prevailed at least in the Middle East, when diverse literate nations found themselves for the first time neighbors. Thus one large-scale situation led to developments which produced a new large-scale situation. But even the larger regions of the Amarna age were still surrounded by yet larger areas scarcely touched by urban culture. From these wider regions, borne by the improved military horsemanship developed in the presence of and in response to the civilizations themselves, came the several

waves of great invasions, especially at the end of the second millennium B.C. These invasions, largely led by Indo-Europeans, could almost swamp and eventually transform the developed regions of the Middle East, of northern India, and possibly also of northern China. So ended the period of the bronze-age cultures, with their recondite, basically pictographic scripts—though the already typical relative isolation of China may have permitted the survival of such a script there.

A world of Greeks, Hebrews, Persians, Indo-Aryans, and Chou Chinese emerged from those invasions in the first millennium B.C. Among these there prevailed a new historical climate, that of the iron age—in which the zone of civilization expanded to hemispheric dimensions, and some of the main constant elements of the Afro-Eurasian interregional configuration were already visible. Despite the distances involved, there was already clearly a degree of community of destiny, though whether it was more by parallelism of separate developments or by active interrelation among regions is not always clear at this early period. Interregional trade was beginning to make use of coinage, almost simultaneously in Europe and in China though independently as to detail; and from the Mediterranean to India there was a new, alphabetic—and so relatively accessible—type of writing, which gradually prevailed as the remnants of the old local valley traditions disappeared.

We now come to an age everywhere great, and at the same time important for the changes it wrought in the Afro-Eurasian historical configuration. Everywhere the secular expansion was continuing—the more rapidly perhaps for the seeming interruption of the great invasions. Urban control spread in the Mediterranean westward; in Iran and Central Eurasia; in India southward; in China. The sheer spatial vision of a Macedonian Alexander, fighting in the Punjab, eager to sail down the Ganges, and trying to grasp with his mind the Afro-Eurasian zone as a geographically realizable whole, witnesses to a breadth of horizons impossible a thousand years before; a breadth which left its mark in what followed—that is, in the great classical philosophical outbursts from Thales and Isaiah to Mencius. For as has often been pointed out, in the latter half of the first millennium B.C. we have unparalleled creative flowerings in all the four great Afro-Eurasian core-areas.

Indeed, the core-areas were in some measure constituted precisely by these flowerings. It is over against both the area which ultimately accepted a Greek tradition, and that which ultimately accepted a Sanskrit tradition, as formulated in this period, that the Middle East set itself off by clinging to contrasting ideals. The intellectual life of this time remained ever after classical for Europe and China. Even for India it was of more significance than might appear on the surface; for this was the age of philosophy par excellence behind the India of Shankara. For the Middle East, this was the age of prophecy—Iranian and Hebrew—which created norms contrasting sharply with those of more ancient lettered traditions, and were presupposed in the

later work of Muhammad and his followers in reconstructing the Middle East. Jaspers has with reason called this the "Axial Age". It was an age which differentiated cultures, but it also led to a deeper interregional interchange. Whatever may have been the initial role of interconnections in the intellectual atmosphere of the time in fostering these simultaneous wonders, they resulted in the presence everywhere of selective intellectual standards which permitted intercultural influences to proceed on the level of abstract thought—a fact above all important for the course of science.

The world was at any rate now ready for the pervasive spread of Hellenism—aspects of which traveled from the Atlantic to the Ganges, with repercussions also in the Far East. Then Hellenism itself—perhaps even in India, where the imperial impulse came from the northwest—helped to make the world ready also for the age of the great regional empires, that of Rome in the Mediterranean, of the Mauryas and their successors in India, of the Han in China. For these empires reflected in some degree, all of them (even that of the Hellenophile Parthians, the most obscure of them), the work of the classical sages, Stoic or Buddhist or Confucian, in human integration. The relatively stable and wide-spread order brought about by this handful of empires in turn affected interregional relations. The Romans soon complained of the loss of gold to distant India. This was surely a symptom of a wider movement of the same sort as Hellenism. As the direct force of Hellenism receded, what may be called Indicism, in varied forms, spread equally widely—in the Far South East, in the Middle East (especially Iran and Central Eurasia), in China itself; and it had repercussions even in Europe. Indicism involved no spectacular conquests such as that of Alexander, but it is possible that its effects went deeper in a wider area. But the most important result of the empires was, as the early Christians themselves saw in the case of the Roman Empire, that each of them cleared the way for one, or more than one, of the great universal religions. The most prominent fact about the interregional as about the regional aspects of the following period was the towering position of the religions.

For meanwhile, in the wake of the sages had arisen (out of more local antecedents) the great universal religions, with their scriptures, their exclusive moral and cosmological creeds, their hope for the ordinary individual beyond death, and their demand for his personal commitment now.

These appeared now either in the form of faiths like Christianity and Mahâyâna Buddhism, created in this mould from their inception, or of old faiths made over like Rabbinical Judaism and (apparently) the Hindu Shaivism and Vaishnavism. From the cities as centers, everywhere they moved out to prevail over the population; early in the first millennium CE, throughout the Afro-Eurasian zone one or another of them achieved political power and attempted to gain an exclusive recognition for itself. They left practically no gaps, though there were some areas where none was fully successful in its

rivalry against the others; among them, they practically stamped out the old paganisms or else subordinated them to the new spirit. Simultaneously with the drive of the religions for power arose—with or without the inspiration of the almost universally present Indian influences, the ascetic and monastic tendencies which came to dominate one aspect of Afro-Eurasian life for more than a thousand years. With the advent of the universal religions, region was linked with region as fellow-worshippers believed one creed across the most distant frontiers; but at the same time barriers were raised between many regions as the new orthodoxies, on a higher level than any more primitive ones, developed their own self-contained intolerance, with which they tried to dominate the life of one region or another.

In the course of all this—and partly as a fruit of the activity of the empires—whole provinces were being opened up to the latest forms of urban life, for instance Gaul or Szechuan; hence by the time of Attila the urban-dominated areas of Greater Eurasia had come to present a solid belt of territories across the hemisphere equivalent in mass to the remaining areas to the north. The new invasions (nomadic or simply barbarous) might overcome outlying areas like Western Europe or even the specially exposed north of China, but they no longer overwhelmed the whole of the continuing cultural and commercial nexus. Till the beginning of fully modern times there was no general breach in the literate traditions such as that which so sharply reduced the role of the bronze-age cultures. This was, to be sure, only in part the result of sheer size; in part it was a matter of wider participation in the higher traditions within the several regions—a result to which both the structures of commerce and the character of the religions had contributed. Indeed, the religions undertook a new sort of cultural offensive in their missionary activities—particularly those of Christianity, Judaism, Manicheanism, and Buddhism, but also Hinduism—which extended beyond the old centers to marginal areas such as northern Europe, Central Eurasia, the Far South East, or northeast Africa.

There prevailed in the middle of the first millennium CE a radically different temper from that of the age in which Hellenism had spread. Everywhere now the idea of a universal religion as commanding the allegiance of a population was taken for granted. It was into this cultural setting that Islâm erupted, claiming to be the culmination of universal religion, and immediately transforming the balance of political power in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and the Eurasian steppe, where it set bounds to Chinese influence. It created a powerful social and spiritual ideal which within not many centuries began to penetrate into almost every part of the hemisphere, and which presented, to a greater or lesser degree, a permanent cultural and political challenge to each of the great civilizations which it did not actually absorb. For centuries the regional imagination, in both India and Europe, was dominated by the Muslim peril and given its unity by it. The unifying effect of

Islâm in the Middle East itself soon had far-reaching results. Islâmic scholars gathered up the scattered scientific traditions of Greece and Iran and India and, fusing them, spread them from China to Western Europe. Islâmic merchants carried widely some technological discoveries of China, most notably paper. At the same time that Islâm was thus changing interregional conditions, other Afro-Eurasian developments gave Islâm itself new directions. New regions, such as the Far South East, were being more fully developed; there Islâm made rapid headway, so outflanking the older centers. Islâm promised itself, not without reason, that it would soon be absorbing the whole world.

During these centuries of the appearance and the later expansion of Islâm, there was taking place at least the usual cumulative improvement in technique, notably in military and even financial techniques; the range of commerce expanded, as in sub-Saharan Africa, which now effectively entered the Afro-Eurasian arena of civilization with the advent above all of the camel in the Sahara; or as in the far north-west (where a subarctic link to North America aborted). The diverse strains of learning were being integrated in scholastic-type syntheses of the old philosophical traditions with the dominant religions, from Shankara, who in ninth-century India finally disposed philosophically of Buddhism, to Chu Hsi and Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Practically as widespread as scholasticism was a marked institutional cultivation of love-mysticism (in the form of *bhakti* in Hinduism, Sûfism in Islâm, and the mystical traditions in eastern and western Christianity)—a mysticism which was often associated with the rise of numerous vernacular languages alongside the handful of classical ones dating chiefly from the Axial Age.

Here again it is hard to know to what extent the parallel developments in learning and religion were purely parallelisms, resulting from a common set of historical problems without much actual interaction in any form. Certainly to a degree it was simply that common problems were being met, and sometimes they were answered differently—thus, in contrast to all other regions, in China in this period there was a clear decline of the universal religions, Buddhism and Taoism, to the profit of what was essentially a philosophical system of the “Axial age”, Confucianism. Nevertheless, by this time the interactions among regions—as a result of Islâm, or of the Mongols, or of scientific or artistic borrowing, and the like—were so frequent, and involved even the isolated China and the distant Western Europe so freely, that these developments cannot be fully disengaged from each other. Whether merely parallel growths from the past, or the fruit of a contemporary climate of needs, they formed the inescapable context of interregional contacts, which commonly assumed a religious guise.

In the midst of this period occurred an event which was unusually conducive to bringing all cultures of the Afro-Eurasian zone together on a common level. The variegated richness of the urban cultural traditions was matched by their tendency now to dominate increasingly even the remoter parts of the

Afro-Eurasian land mass. Muslims, Chinese, and, later, Russians continued to converge in their Central-Eurasian expansion, so that by the thirteenth century a tribe in remote Mongolia might find itself cramped by the overweening demands and the overwhelming prestige of the urban powers. The young Chingiz Khan, at the farthest edge of the steppe, was outraged, it is said, by imperial agents. Once it was the river-valley civilizations that were surrounded; later, in Han-Roman times, the civilizations were merely equivalent in combined mass to the barbarian ranges on their margins, and able to absorb their attacks. But now it was the turn of the barbarians, of the nomads, to feel themselves surrounded. Their desperate last massed fury under Chingiz Khan perhaps reflects the advance of urbanism as much as does their unprecedented use of urban skills in all their regional forms. This unexpected product of the joint efforts of the Afro-Eurasian peoples in turn devastated the greater part of the Afro-Eurasian zone, and permanently deflected its cultural and political history.

But the Mongols' fury, under the interregional circumstances, only speeded the day when the urban tradition would penetrate far into the greater part of Central Eurasia, the nomads themselves turning Buddhist and Muslim and becoming increasingly abject in subjection to imperially oriented khans. Despite what seems to have been an Afro-Eurasian zone-wide depression of urban prosperity in the fourteenth century—under the Yüan, under the later Delhi Sultanate, in the Middle East that failed to repair ports and irrigation canals, in the slowed growth of West-European towns; despite the vast interregional sweep of the Black Death (with its uncalculated effects on the continuity of culture in marginal areas like North Africa, and generally on the interregional balance of power), the economic stage was being set for the world-wide exploitation of the "riches of the East" by upstarts of the far West. The range of commercially developed areas had come to cover the larger part of the hemisphere, and the techniques of travel and trade, as well as the varieties of luxury and of specialized use, were innumerable. The far West had been stimulated by religiously-inspired wars in the Middle East, but insulated from most of the Mongol torrent (in contrast to the time of Attila) by newly urbanized territories in eastern Europe.

We have been seeing that the Afro-Eurasian historical complex was not merely a framework for mutual borrowings and influences among organically independent civilizations; it was a positive factor with its own proper development. This is visible even in the diffusion of inventions. At this point, after the Mongol turmoil, the most recent Chinese inventions evidently found a faster diffusion than ever; their historical effects are not however reducible to sheer diffusion, but reflected the complex pattern then attained by the interregional configuration. They had very different effects as developed in different areas. Notable among these inventions were gunpowder weapons, the sea compass, and printing (including most recently moveable print). Some

of these might have been independently invented in Europe or elsewhere, inspired by a common background won through the then relatively direct trade relations; all of them could well have been inspired from the Far East by "stimulus diffusion" (that is, by suggestion through mere general awareness that they existed), or even have been direct imports from the Far East. In any case, all of them came to be known, and most of them to be used in some degree, almost everywhere in the main centers at about the same time. Everywhere (save in China itself) the rise of gunpowder seems then to have passed gradually from its first use as a minor auxiliary "fire-works" weapon, to more efficient and at last decisive uses. But these uses differed in different areas, according to regional social conditions and according to the position of the region in the wider context, and so had strongly diverse consequences. These inventions helped send the fresh Occident out into the oceans, most importantly, at first (because of the pattern of interregional trade), the Indian Ocean. Yet a similar gunpowder artillery seems to have helped create, likewise at the start of the sixteenth century, the three great Muslim land empires (Ottoman, Safavî, and Mogul) which, all three being oriented away from the Indian Ocean, failed to regain control of the long-distance trade in that ocean for Muslims after it had been lost to the first rush of Occidentals.

WESTERN EUROPE AS AN AFRO-EURASIAN FRONTIER

As we have come to realize, within this vast historical complex, Western Europe played a peripheral and till well into the Middle Ages a backward role. The Carthaginians and Etruscans were remarkable peoples, but they added few basic improvements to the cultural patterns which came to them from the eastern Mediterranean. The same was true of the Romans. Though they won political supremacy over the Hellenistic eastern Mediterranean, on the northwestern fringe of which their city was located, they always themselves looked to the east for cultural guidance. Even their most treasured creation, the Roman law, was rather a Mediterranean creation than an Italic one, though its language was for a long time Latin. Only in the High Middle Ages did Western Europeans begin truly to rise to the creative level of the core-areas of civilization. At the start of the Crusades they were still crude and ignorant as compared with either Greeks or Arabs in fields like medicine and chemical technology; they were not up to the "Greek fire" of the Arabs; by the end of the Crusades the Latins had for the first time become more or less their equals.

The famed Westward march of empire, as we have seen, dissolves into a general expansion of civilization in all directions of the compass. Western Europe was a frontier region rather in the same sense as the Sudan or Malaysia, though it began to develop urban, literate culture earlier than either of

those areas. It shared with them a dependent relation to the older cultural centers. As in those areas, the flow of cultural learning was quite one-sided—from China, India, the Middle East, and (above all) the eastern Mediterranean to the Occident, with little going in the opposite direction. For a long time this was reflected even in interregional trade. The Occident, like other frontier areas to the south or the east, had primarily natural resources, including slaves, to offer, rather than perfected finished goods. Accordingly, local Occidental events—the ups and downs of local urbanization and learning—were of relatively little importance to the world at large. Medieval Islamic writers were strongly aware of Byzantium and India and China, but except at moments and places of direct contact had little more interest in the far Occident than in Tibet or East Africa. The main features of the Afro-Eurasian historical context, the “mainstream” if there was one, were little affected by events in such far corners.

Perhaps the Occident had advantages in its frontier position, somewhat similar to those which Korea and Japan seem to have had in roughly the same period, being equally removed from the main lines of interregional intercourse. In virgin soil, as it were, the Occidentals were able to develop independent cultural variants upon older themes, relatively undisturbed by the cultural and military turmoil which often prevailed from the Aegean to Bengal. Moreover, till the later Middle Ages the West Europeans always had attractive space beyond the current limits of civilization in which to expand their sphere of activity (something which was largely denied to the Japanese). The clew to much of the Occident’s character may lie in its long being a frontier region. In any case, comparisons between the Occident and other peripheral regions, which stood in other relations to the core culture areas, might be more fruitful than between the Occident and those centers themselves; for instance, as regards the relation between local creativity and receptivity to outside influences.

When we look at human historical life as a whole, it will not do simply to give more attention to “Eastern” societies—either for their own interest or as influencing or contributing to Europe. We must learn to recognize the Occident as one of a number of societies involved in wider historical processes to some degree transcending or even independent of any given society. Though the Occident was relatively isolated, the effect even on the Occident of its involvement in these wider processes cannot be reduced to the sum of influences or borrowings from this or that other society. It cannot be reduced even to more general effects, positive and negative, resulting from the powerful presence of its neighbors to the south or east. Through them, the wider interregional pattern ultimately sets limits at any given time to what alternatives were open to the Occident or any other society within it. The expansion of the area of civilization, the accumulation of technique, the steady rise in the level of social power everywhere, as well as many more particular sequences

of events, took the forms they did and had the effects they did on an inter-regional basis. The evolution of Western Europe depended, in some of its first presuppositions, on the course of development of the Afro-Eurasian historical life as a whole.¹

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¹ What has been said so far has serious implications for the way in which we must view the relation of Modernity to the older Occidental culture. I have developed some of these implications in an article to appear in the *Journal of the Central Institute of Islamic Research* (Karachi). Briefly, the most popular views of world Modernization have seen it either as a shift from essentially unchanging tradition into repetition, at an altered pace, of Modern Western sequences (*cf.* J. M. Romein, "The Common Human Pattern", in *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, Vol. IV, 1958); or as an expansion of the historical Occidental society which may be either adopted in various degrees or resisted by other societies. Both views are inadequate. They must be supplemented by understanding Modernity as the outcome of the breakdown of the common historical conditions on which rested the pre-Modern Afro-Eurasian historical complex as a whole. A degree of deliberate innovation was always present in the Afro-Eurasian civilized societies as compared with tribal societies; even major florescences such as those of classical Greece or classical Islâm, which sometimes led to serious changes in the historical configuration, could be consistent with its continuity. The Renaissance and the early Occidental expansion in the oceans, in fact, did not in themselves escape the presuppositions of the pre-modern historical pattern in any crucial way. In the sixteenth century the level of social and cultural power of the several Afro-Eurasian civilizations was still essentially on a common level (everywhere far higher than so many millennia earlier). Between 1600 and 1800, developments within the Occident finally destroyed these common historical presuppositions; but as soon as they were fully destroyed for the Occident itself (that is, by the generation of 1800), they were effectively destroyed for all the other civilized societies also, as a result of the already existing solidarity of Afro-Eurasian history. Since 1800 the results of that event in most other societies have been very different from those in the Occident, but equally "modern" in an important sense. Modernity is not to be compared with the spread of Hellenism, nor to be reduced to the stages of internal Occidental experience. Though its initiation within the Occident has certain crucial consequences, Modernity is simply "Western" neither in its origins, nor in its impact as a world event, nor even as an expression of regional cultural continuity; above all, not in the nature of the cultural problems it raises for us all.