Before European Hegemony

The World System A.D. 1250–1350

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CHAPTER

1

Studying a System in Formation

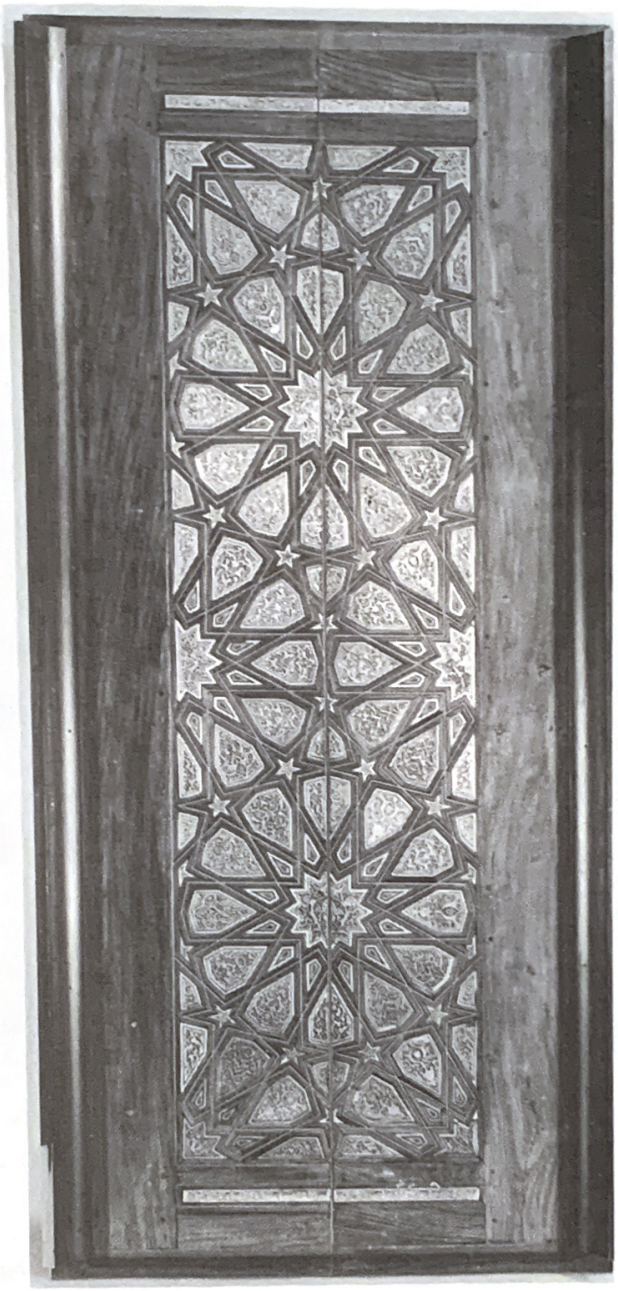
The second half of the thirteenth century was a remarkable moment in world history. Never before had so many regions of the Old World come in contact with one another—albeit still only superficially. At the beginning of the Christian era, the Roman and Chinese empires had been in indirect contact, but the connections between them declined when both empires fragmented. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam unified many parts of the central region that lay between the European and Chinese extremities, reaching out in both directions, but the peripheral areas of this reviving world economy still remained relatively isolated from one another. By the eleventh and, even more, twelfth century, many parts of the Old World began to become integrated into a system of exchange from which all apparently benefited. The apogee of this cycle came between the end of the thirteenth and the first decades of the fourteenth century, by which time even Europe and China had established direct, if decidedly limited, contact with each another.

The thirteenth century was remarkable in another way. In region after region there was an efflorescence of cultural and artistic achievement. Never before had so many parts of the Old World simultaneously reached cultural maturity. In China, the most glorious pottery ever produced, Sung celadonware, was being created, and in Persia glowing turquoise-glazed bowls constituted the only serious rival. In Mamluk Egypt, craftsmen were fashioning elaborate furniture inlaid with complex arabesques of silver and gold, and in western Europe, cathedral building reached its apex. The gem-like stained glass window-adorned Saint Chapelle of Paris was built in mid-thirteenth century, just before St. Louis departed on crusade. The great Hindu temple complexes of south India climaxed at this same time. Almost everywhere there was evidence of a surfeit of wealth being devoted to ornamentation and symbolic display. The era was equally productive intellectually, suggesting that the surplus was used not only to produce things but to support scholars as well.

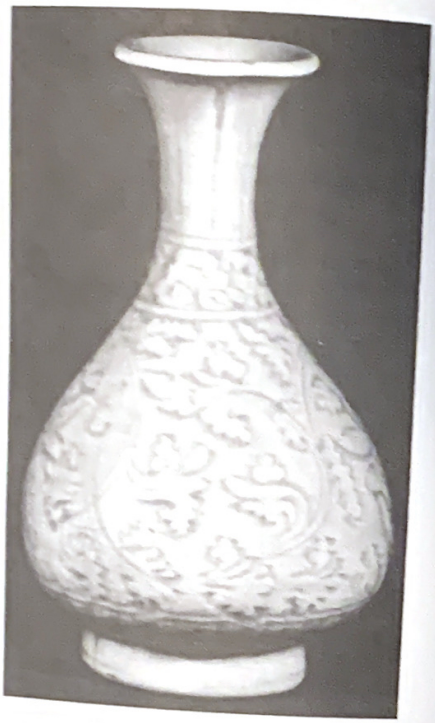
These two qualities of the thirteenth century, increased economic integration and cultural efflorescence, were not unrelated. Technological and social innovations produced surpluses, which were, in turn, traded internationally to further intensify development. Parallel advances in navigation and statecraft facilitated contact among distant societies, which generated even more surpluses. In all areas, prosperity—at least at the top—yielded high culture, and Europe, hitherto the least developed region, perhaps had the most to gain from the new links being forged.

In this book we explore the thirteenth century "world economy" which facilitated such pandemic prosperity for its rulers, and examine how it was forged. We also examine why this promising start faltered by the middle of the fourteenth century. How much of it remained when, in the sixteenth century, Europe took the lead in forging what Wallerstein (1974) has termed the "modern world-system"? In *that* world system, which has persisted for some five hundred years, the West was clearly hegemonic. But to understand its roots it is necessary to examine the period *before* European hegemony. That is the descriptive task of this book.

There is an analytic task as well. The world economy of the thirteenth century is not only fascinating in itself but, because it contained no single hegemonic power, provides an important con-



Pair of doors inlaid with carved ivory. Mamluk Egypt, late thirteenth to early fourteenth century. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; bequest of Edward Seymour, 1891 (91.1.2064).



Celadon vase, Chinese, late thirteenth century to early fourteenth century. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; anonymous gift, 1965 (65.82.3).

trast to the world system that grew out of it: the one Europe reshaped to its own ends and dominated for so long. This contrast suggests that the characteristics of world systems are not invariant. There is no unique way for the parts to be organized. Furthermore, world systems are not static. They evolve and change. At this moment in time, the particular world system that originated in the sixteenth century is in the throes of change. Understanding the system that preceded it may help in better comprehending what

Stained glass window, Troyes cathedral, France, late twelfth century. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; gift of Ella Brummer, in memory of her husband, Ernest Brummer, 1977 (1977.346.1).

Brass bowl inlaid with silver, Mongol Iran, mid-fourteenth century. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935 (35.64.2).

lies ahead. We return to these themes at the end of this book, but first we need to know much more about the thirteenth century itself.

The Thirteenth Century: A World System?

Between A.D. 1250 and 1350 an international trade economy was developing that stretched all the way from northwestern Europe to China; it involved merchants and producers in an extensive (worldwide) if narrow network of exchange. Although primary products (including but not confined to specialty agricultural items, mostly spices) constituted a significant proportion of all items traded, particularly over short distances, manufactured goods were surprisingly central to the system, which probably could not have been sustained over long distances without them. The production of these goods had to be sufficient to meet domestic needs as well as those of export. Thus, all the units in the system were producing surpluses, impossible unless the methods of mobilizing labor and organizing the work process were quite advanced.

Furthermore, the trade involved a wide variety of merchant communities at various points on the globe. These merchants did not necessarily speak or write the same languages, although Arabic covered a wide area, as did Greek and the vernaculars of Latin, and Mandarin Chinese was a lingua franca for the many nationalities in the far east. Nor were their local currencies the same. Silver was highly valued in Europe, gold was used in the Middle East, whereas copper coins were the preferred specie in China. Distances, as measured by time, were calculated in weeks and months at best, but it took years to traverse the entire circuit. And yet, goods were transferred, prices set, exchange rates agreed upon, contracts entered into, credit—on funds or on goods located elsewhere—extended, partnerships formed, and, obviously, records kept and agreements honored. I hope to show how advanced this system was in the thirteenth century—although whether it was "modern capitalism" and whether this could be called a "world system" remain to be established.

In this book I have no intention of engaging in a fruitless argument concerning the "origins" of "true" or "modern" capitalism.[1] Nor do I intend to engage world system theorists in a similarly unproductive debate about the precise moment in history at which one moves from world empires to a more global system, much less to determine when "traditional world-economies" metamorphosize into a modern world system. Wallerstein (1974) distinguishes multiple and ordinary "world-economies" and empires from *the* "modern world system." Although he acknowledges the existence of world empires before the sixteenth century, he still treats the modern world system as if it were the first.[2] But he is simply one of the more recent to enter the fray (see also Ekholm, 1980; Mann, 1986; Schneider, 1977; Chase-Dunn, 1989).

Historians have traditionally disagreed about the dating of the capitalist (as opposed to the classical) world economy. Even Marx was ambivalent, at one time tracing capitalism back to the thirteenth century, but later changing his mind and opting for the sixteenth century. Students of the thirteenth-century textile industry of Flanders (see Chapter 3 for Espinas, 1923; Laurent, 1935) argue forcefully, on the basis of the mode of production and the growing opposition between owners and workers (a class conflict that reached its peak in the latter part of the century), that industrialization had already occurred there, and that this industrial system was inextricably linked to an already established "world-market."[3] Braudel (1984) acknowledges that the commercial revolution of the thirteenth century clearly initiated a European "world-economy" that, although it may have temporarily aborted in the trough of the mid-fourteenth century, nevertheless foreshadowed the system that was to come. And Eric Wolf (1982), in his book that begins with 1400, also stresses that the Eurocentered world system that developed after that date was built on the base of an existing system not previously dominated by Europe. These debates, in the last analysis, are over definitional niceties rather than empirical realities. It seems more important to examine the seamless web of the latter than to fight over the precise boundaries between historic epochs.

One empirical basis for distinguishing between the "traditional" and "modern" periods might be to differentiate societies organized for production for the market that *do not separate* ownership of capital from ownership of labor power from those societies that

do. But upon closer inspection, this distinction does not hold up, for free labor and monetization of exchange long predate "modern industrial production,"[4] slave labor and barter persist far into the modern era, and there probably never was an urban society in which "owners" were not leisured.

Another distinction often made is between the "commercial revolution" and the "industrial revolution," but to draw the line between the two would often be too arbitrary and, indeed, too late. Industrialism developed at different times in different places. The level of development of Chinese metallurgy in the twelfth century would not be achieved in Europe until the sixteenth century (Hartwell, 1966, 1967), and China's paper making and printing technology would not be duplicated in the West for several centuries (Carter, 1955; Needham, 1954–85, 1981). Although we know less about the processes of production in the Middle East and Asia than we do about those in Europe, the fact that large quantities of cloth were produced (cotton and linen in the Arab region, cotton and silk in India, and silk in China) suggests that the techniques used for production must have been equal to those in other places (such as Flanders) for which we do have information.

Nor will scale allow us to differentiate the thirteenth from the sixteenth century. One must acknowledge that the scale of production and trade in the thirteenth century was less than what prevailed in the sixteenth century, although it was higher than in the fifteenth. But that is hardly a fair measure. In comparison with the scale of international commerce today, the exchanges of the sixteenth century are miniscule. The important comparison is not with the future but with the past. Did a significant increase in trade occur in the thirteenth century? And did it unite many developing areas? Most medievalists claim that it did. The comments by Lopez (1976: 93–94) are quite relevant:

> At first glance, if we compare the patterns of trade in the Commercial Revolution to those in the Industrial Revolution, certain differences will strike us . . . [A]ll proportions are almost unbelievably smaller. Luxury products . . . tend to play a more important role than commodities for mass consumption. Many . . . business men show greater interest in enlarging profit margins . . . than in enlarging the number of sales. . . . Still the volume of exchanges . . . [by the thirteenth century was] impressive . . . [T]he sea trade of Genoa in 1293 was three times as large as the entire revenue of the Kingdom of France in the same year. . . .

The same radical increase in the scale of international trade was observed in Sung China. Mark Elvin (1973: 171–172) describes the thirteenth-century expansion of China's international trade, noting that by then China was exporting

> copper and iron goods, porcelain, silks, linens, chemicals, sugar, rice and books, and receiving in exchange spices and other exotic items. Parts of the Chinese rural economy became directly linked to production for the overseas market.

Relatively speaking, then, the scale in the Middle Ages did not differ very much from that in the early "modern capitalist" age, particularly if we recognize that technology had not changed drastically by the sixteenth century. If we are not to come to a technologically determined resolution of this problem, claiming that the "industrial" period appears when inanimate energy is substituted for animate,[5] we had best abandon the a priori attempt to define world system, modernity, capitalism, etc. until we use these terms—duly separated and empirically loaded—to analyze concrete moments in history in concrete places.

Of all the comments I have read, those of Fernand Braudel seem to be the most sensible.[6] He acknowledges that world-economies existed in various parts of the world long before the thirteenth century and that certainly a European world-economy had taken shape before the sixteenth century, singled out as so crucial by Wallerstein and in certain writings by Marx.[7] He argues that thirteenth-century Italy had all the capitalist institutions and even the industrial production, using free wage labor, that would be required to classify it as a capitalist world-economy (Braudel, 1984: 79, 91).

But even the wisdom of Braudel cannot protect him from an unconscious Eurocentric slip. Although he readily acknowledges that "the first world-economy ever to take shape in Europe [was born] between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries" (1984: 92) and that "several world-economies have succeeded . . . each other in the geographical expression that is Europe," or rather, the "European world-economy has changed shape several times since the

important when arguing for world economies

thirteenth century" (1984: 70), he fails to make what to me is the essential point. Before Europe became *one* of the world-economies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when it joined the long distance trade system that stretched through the Mediterranean into the Red Sea and Persian Gulf and on into the Indian Ocean and through the Strait of Malacca to reach China, there were numerous preexistent world-economies. Without them, when Europe gradually "reached out," it would have grasped empty space rather than riches. My plan is to examine this world system as a whole, treating Europe at that time as it should be seen, as an upstart peripheral to an ongoing operation.

This book is less interested in identifying origins and more in examining a crucial moment in history. It takes the position that in terms of time, the century between A.D. 1250 and 1350 constituted a fulcrum or critical "turning point" in world history, and in terms of space, the Middle East heartland region, linking the eastern Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean, constituted a geographic fulcrum on which West and East were then roughly balanced. The thesis of this book is that there was no *inherent historical necessity* that shifted the system to favor the West rather than the East, nor was there any inherent historical necessity that would have prevented cultures in the eastern region from becoming the progenitors of a modern world system. This thesis seems at least as compelling as its opposite. The usual approach is to examine ex post facto the outcome—that is, the economic and political hegemony of the West in modern times—and then to reason backward, to rationalize why this supremacy *had* to be. I want to avoid this.

It is not that I do not recognize that the outcome determines the narrative constructed to "lead inexorably" to it. This indeed is the real methodological problem of historiography. I am struck with the incisive comment of Germaine Tillion, written in a somewhat different context:

> [A]s we all know, events must run their course before becoming history, so that *all* true history exists only by virtue of its conclusion, and begins its historical career from there.[8]

If this is indeed correct, then beginning with a different outcome at a different moment in time will lead to a different account of

the sequence and a different set of items to be explained. Rather than taking the outcome of the industrial revolution for granted and then trying to explain its "causes," I therefore start from an earlier vantage point. While my story is no more true (nor more false) than the conventional one, it does illuminate areas and issues that the story of Europe's hegemony conceals.

I examine the system of world trade circa 1300 A.D. to see how and to what extent the world was linked into a common commercial network of production and exchange. Since such production and exchange were relatively unimportant to the subsistence economies of all participating regions, the question is not one of defending an unrealistic vision of a tightly entailed international system of interdependence and exchange. This was also true in the sixteenth century, however. Thus, if it is possible to argue that a world system began in that century, it is equally plausible to argue that it existed much earlier.

To some extent, it depends upon which part of the system is used to determine when volume is enough to be "counted" as part of such a system. Certainly, considering Europe, which at mid-thirteenth century was still very much part of the periphery, long-distance trade was not making a significant contribution to the internal economies, still heavily agrarian and oriented to subsistence. However, even in Europe there were major variations between the "city-states" of Italy and Flanders and the more peripheral subregions, such as Germany or England. Lopez (1976: 93) points out that "the difference between Italy north of the Tiber and the most retarded parts of Europe during the Commercial Revolution was as significant as that between England or the United States and India or China during the Industrial Revolution." And once one moved away from the city centers that maintained links to the outside, one was clearly in the shadowy world of subsistence. Braudel (1984: 30) adopts Richard Haëpke's felicitous phrase, "an archipelago of towns," to describe the spottiness of development. This seems a particularly sensitive way to capture the fact that, within the same general region, a variety of social formations coexisted: from the monetized trading centers, already profiting from foreign exchange and already beginning to shape production in their hinterlands for export, to outpockets in the most depressed mountain ridges and valleys, untouched by the

changes taking place. It is because of this that I have chosen to focus on cities rather than countries, since I want to trace the connections among the highpoints of the archipelagos themselves.[9] But it must be stressed that they were, then even more than now, surrounded by a vast sea of encapsulated rural regions.

Not only were there great variations in the European periphery, but there were also substantial differences within the countries in the Old World core—in the Middle East, India, and China (at that time the leading contender for hegemony). Although the Middle East was generally more developed than Europe, it contained large areas relatively unintegrated with the central places that controlled empires. Cairo and Baghdad stand out as dual imperial centers, but their linkages through overland and sea routes tied them selectively to an "archipelago" of hinterlands. Antioch, Aleppo, and Acre connected Baghdad to the Mediterranean, whereas Basra connected Baghdad to the Indian Ocean and the trade of the east. Northeastward across the desert was Baghdad's overland link to the east, the same route the Mongols used to invade her in the second half of the thirteenth century. Cairo was connected to the Mediterranean world through Alexandria, whereas the Nile linked her to the Sudan and desert roads led across North Africa; the sea trade along the Red Sea made a port call at Jiddah or at Upper Egypt before transiting via Aden to the east.

Nor was China a simple and unchanging monolith. That vast zone was differentiated on at least three axes: north and south, coast and interior, and along rivers or off their pathways. In general, times of expanding prosperity were associated with movements of population from north to south, from interior to coast, and from alluvial valleys to more peripheral places (see the careful work of Hartwell, 1982).

The Indian subcontinent was similarly complex and divided into subregions subject to very different imperatives. Northern India prospered when links to the Muslim world were strong and when the land routes to Russia on the north and to China on the east were open. The condition of south India, on the other hand, was contingent more upon the sea trade through the Indian Ocean, and there was often a clear differentiation between coastal and interior zones.

Similarities

One of the striking findings of the research was that similarities between trading partners in the thirteenth century far outweighed differences, and, wherever differences appeared, the West lagged behind. This seemed to contradict the usual assumptions. Furthermore, in spite of the tendency of western scholars dealing with the "Rise of the West"[10] to stress the *unique* characteristics of western capitalism, comparative examination of economic institutions reveals enormous similarities and parallels between Asian, Arab, *and* Western forms of capitalism. This finding is particularly intriguing because, as we all know, variations cannot be explained by constants. The chief areas of similarity are these:

THE INVENTION OF MONEY AND CREDIT

In all three culture areas recognized currencies were a *sine qua non* of international trade, with developments in western Europe coming much later and, if our contention is correct, derivatively (the Italian merchants borrowing existing mechanisms from their Muslim counterparts in the Middle East who had been using them for centuries).[11] In all three regions states played an important role in minting, printing, and/or guaranteeing such currencies. Indeed, the preferred specie for international transactions before the thirteenth century, in Europe as well as the Middle East and even India, were the gold coins struck first by Byzantium and then Egypt. It was not until after the middle of the thirteenth century that some Italian cities (Florence and Genoa) began to mint their own gold coins, but these were used to supplement rather than supplant the Middle Eastern coins already in circulation.

In China, money followed a somewhat different line of development. Because of the strong state (and a preference for copper rather than gold), the fictive connection between worth and the coin that represented it seems to us more transparent. The currency had value because it was backed (and later controlled) by the state. This clear connection made possible the introduction of paper money in China as early as T'ang times (ninth century) and its further expansion during the Sung and Yuan dynasties, even though paper money did not appear in Europe until centuries later.

Credit, of course, is the intermediate step between "hard" (i.e., metallic) money and paper as legal tender. It is important to note that credit instruments (essentially promises to pay later and in some other place) were also highly developed in the Middle East and China long before they became critical to business transactions at the fairs of western Europe.

Similarly, the social role of "banker" was found in the Orient long before it appeared in the form of the "benches" or "banco's" of the Italian merchants who set them up at the trade fairs of Champagne. Occasionally, western scholars point out that letters of credit elsewhere were usually between "owners" and their agents or factors abroad and that, at least in the case of major Middle Eastern and Indian traders, including Jews, these were connected through family ties. But it is important to recall that in the beginning, and for quite a long time afterward, the ties that bound transactions in Europe were also those of blood. Family firms were the original form of credit banking and, throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, banking houses (of which the later Medicis of Florence were to become the most famous example) were "family" houses. This institution continued down through the nineteenth century, with the "houses" of Rothschild and even Rockefeller running banks involved in international finance.

MECHANISMS FOR POOLING CAPITAL AND DISTRIBUTING RISK

For long distance trade in particular, large amounts of initial capital were required to purchase the goods that were to be shipped for later sale. During the long voyages, this "capital" was "tied up" in goods that might or might not reach their destinations. Six months was not an unusual duration for transit and, of the ships that sailed out filled with items of high value, some would sink and others would be captured, with their value either lost entirely or reduced by the sums needed to ransom them.[12]

In the Middle East there were elaborate techniques for pooling capital through partnerships or for apportioning profit on the basis of formulas that returned a certain percentage to the merchant advancing the goods (or the financier putting up the money to buy the goods) and another percentage to the partner who accompanied the goods and saw to their disposition at the point of sale (Udovitch, 1970a). Here again, partnerships were often within

families or, in the case of Jews (and later Indian and even overseas Chinese), with coreligionists or conationals. This was also true in Europe. Byrne (1930) described the elaborate system for long-distance shipping that was in place in twelfth and thirteenth century Genoa. It bears some resemblance to the institutions already used by the Arabs to conduct their shipping trade. Furthermore, the father and uncle of the illustrious Marco Polo, who preceded him to the eastern capital of the Khans, constituted just such a family firm.

In thirteenth-century China the state, because it was stronger, played a more central role in trade (an invisible partner, as it were, to the merchants) and wielded a heavier regulatory hand. Furthermore, slavery may have been more important in recruiting the labor force used to produce goods for foreign trade in the royal/state production centers, and slaves were often used as agents for major merchants. This was also true in Mamluk-ruled Egypt. Nevertheless, guilds of independent merchants were powerful in both places (Kato, 1936, for China; Fischel, 1958, and others for Egypt). This introduces a third area of similarity.

MERCHANT WEALTH

It is conventional to celebrate the "laissez-faire" character of western capitalism and to differentiate the European economic system from the "Asiatic" mode by stressing the greater interference of the state in the Orient. The ideology is that European merchants were independent of the state whereas Asian and Arab merchants were dependent upon and under the control of rulers who had other interests. Neither of these stereotypes is entirely correct.

In all three culture areas, merchant wealth, independent of the state, was an important factor. Merchants had a certain latitude to accumulate capital, even though they were in the last analysis at the mercy of the ruling apparatus that often "borrowed" their capital, with no necessary requirement to repay, or imposed heavy forced "contributions" to the public coffers when the state faced economic difficulties. This financier function of the major merchants was common to all three regions.

Furthermore, although in European city-states there was theoretically a government by "burghers," this did not mean autonomy. In the case of the Champagne fairs, the Count, a suprauban au-

thority, played a significant controlling role, and in the cases of the textile towns of Flanders or the city-states of Italy, relatively small and dictatorial "patriciates," comprised of large land owners and capitalists, formulated the policies of the "state" in their own interests, which were not necessarily those of the rest of the inhabitants (Lestocquoy, 1952a; van Werveke, 1944, 1946).

To explain Europe's subsequent hegemony, then, it is necessary to look beyond her internal inventiveness and the virtues of her "unique" entrepreneurial spirit. During the thirteenth century the other world powers had as promising a level of business acumen as, and an even more sophisticated set of economic institutions than, the Europeans, who by the thirteenth century had entered their world system.

Differences

What, then, distinguished the two regions—Europe and the Orient? The difference was that in the thirteenth century Europe lagged behind the Orient whereas by the sixteenth century she had pulled considerably ahead. The question to be asked is why, particularly if one rejects the facile answer that Europe had unique qualities that allowed her to. My contention is that the context—geographic, political, and demographic—in which development occurred was far more significant and determining than any internal psychological or institutional factors. Europe pulled ahead because the "Orient" was temporarily in disarray.

Although the full answer to this question will be presented in the rest of this book, some of the findings might be previewed here. First, there was progressive fragmentation of the intervening overland trade route regions that had been unified by Genghis Khan during the first half of the thirteenth century but, by the end of the century, had been subdivided among his successors. These warring factions shattered the relative calm that existed even as late as the reign of Kubilai Khan (under whose safe conduct the Polos were able to traverse all of central Asia). Arab Asia survived the Crusaders and the capture of Baghdad by the Mongols (1258), but it seems not to have survived the depredations of Tamerlane around 1400. Egypt's prosperity and role in world trade outlived

Baghdad's; Cairo's prosperity reached a peak in the third decade of the fourteenth century (Abu-Lughod, 1971).

Second, the Black Death, which spread from China all the way to Europe in the "calamitous" mid-century between 1348 and 1351, decimated most of the cities along the great sea route of world trade, disturbing customary behavior, changing the terms of exchange because of differential demographic losses, and creating a fluidity in world conditions that facilitated radical transformations, benefiting some and harming others (Gottfried, 1983; McNeill, 1976).

This could be seen in Europe, where England, previously part of the periphery, began to play a more central role after the Plague, since her "die-off" rate was lower than on the continent, and also on the Italian peninsula which had been hit hardest because her trade and traffic with the Middle East were so intense. And although Renaissance Italy recovered her strength, with the Italian towns remaining prosperous and vital until the beginning of the sixteenth century and continuing to dominate Mediterranean trade even afterwards, the Mediterranean had ceased to be the primary highway, in part because the eastern Mediterranean had ceased to offer a unique gateway to the East.

Interestingly enough, it was the galleys of the Italian city-states that, by the end of the thirteenth century, opened the North Atlantic to traffic. This delivered the coup de grâce to a world system that had existed for centuries. By the end of the fifteenth century the Portuguese, strategically sited on that ocean, had "discovered" the sea route to India, sailing down the Atlantic coast of Africa and then up the eastern coast to enter the gateway to the all important Indian Ocean, still under the control (but not for long) of Arab and Indian fleets. This was scarcely a "discovery," for Arab navigation manuals had charted these waters long before (Tibbetts, 1981), and the coastline, albeit in the reverse order from east to west (!), is described in such detail in the manuals that one cannot doubt the prior circumnavigation of Africa by Arab/Persian sailors.

Nevertheless, Arab and Indian vessels proved no match for the Portuguese "men-of-war" that appeared in their waters in the early 1500s. By the end of the opening decade of the sixteenth century,

Portugal held important African ports of call, had defeated the Egyptian fleet guarding the entrances to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, had moved on to establish beachheads on the west coast of India, and had taken over the key point of Malacca that guarded the crucial strait through which, like an eye of a needle, all ships bound for China had to pass. Note that all of this occurred long before the Venetians defeated the Ottoman Turks at the battle of Lepanto (1571), the point at which Braudel (1972) claims European power was assured, and before 1559, the turning point Wallerstein singles out.

The failure to begin the story early enough has resulted, therefore, in a truncated and distorted causal explanation for the rise of the west. I hope to correct this by beginning at an earlier point when the outcome was far from determined. The time between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries marked the transition, and geopolitical factors within the rest of the world system created an opportunity without which Europe's rise would have been unlikely. This is explored in the chapters that follow.

But before moving on to this story we make two digressions. The first contrasts Europe in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries to demonstrate how dramatically she had shifted to center stage. The second discusses sources, methodological issues, and the unavoidable problems involved in preparing a work of this ambitious scope.

European Exemplars of the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

One way to illustrate the change in Europe's relationship to the East between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries is to contrast the lives and preoccupations (as well as fates) of two quintessential scholar/statesmen of their ages: Roger Bacon who lived in the earlier century, and Francis Bacon who lived in the later. The differences in their lives clearly exemplify two central changes: the reversed positions of east and west, and the changing relationship between church and state in Europe.

Roger Bacon, English philosopher, scientist, and educational

reformer, was born in c. 1220 A.D. and lived until c. 1292; the peak of his intellectual productivity came between 1247 and 1257, when he was exploring new branches of knowledge—mathematics, optics, astronomy, and, interestingly enough, alchemy. He was particularly interested in languages and advocated the study of oriental living languages, inter alia, as a way of gaining knowledge from the Muslims of Spain and the Middle East. He hoped to reform European education by incorporating the knowledge that was available in these "higher" civilizations.

Sir Richard W. Southern (1962, third printing in 1980) distinguishes three phases in Europe's attitude toward the Middle East. Phase I, termed "The Age of Ignorance," stretched from about A.D. 700 to 1100 and was based upon religious myths and deductions from the scriptures. The second phase began with the First Crusade (1099), which introduced more elaborate fictions about the Muslim world. During the first half of the twelfth century there was an efflorescence of writings about the "Saracens," about Muhammad, and about the high culture and brave opponents faced in the Crusades. Southern refers to this phase as the "Century of Reason and Hope." By the middle of the twelfth century, mythology was beginning to be supplanted by greater knowledge, particularly after the Qur'an was finally translated into a western language in 1143.[13] "With this translation, the West had for the first time an instrument for the serious study of Islam" (Southern, 1980: 37).

During the next century, Europeans hoped that the peoples contacted in the Crusades would convert to Christianity and that Christian culture would be strengthened by the knowledge held by or transmitted through Islamic cultures. It is in this context that Roger Bacon's interest in "living oriental languages" and St. Thomas Aquinas' (ca. 1225–1274) dependence on Arabic transmitters for Aristotle's works on ethics must be seen. Just before the middle of the thirteenth century, Aristotle's natural, metaphysical, and then moral and political philosophies were gradually recovered. Aquinas' consummate reconciliation between Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy resolved matters until the reformation of the sixteenth century.

However, by 1250 and particularly after Europe's "discovery" of the Mongols, the benign hope of converting the world to Chris-

Portugal held important African ports of call, had defeated the Egyptian fleet guarding the entrances to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, had moved on to establish beachheads on the west coast of India, and had taken over the key point of Malacca that guarded the crucial strait through which, like an eye of a needle, all ships bound for China had to pass. Note that all of this occurred long before the Venetians defeated the Ottoman Turks at the battle of Lepanto (1571), the point at which Braudel (1972) claims European power was assured, and before 1559, the turning point Wallerstein singles out.

The failure to begin the story early enough has resulted, therefore, in a truncated and distorted causal explanation for the rise of the west. I hope to correct this by beginning at an earlier point when the outcome was far from determined. The time between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries marked the transition, and geopolitical factors within the rest of the world system created an opportunity without which Europe's rise would have been unlikely. This is explored in the chapters that follow.

But before moving on to this story we make two digressions. The first contrasts Europe in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries to demonstrate how dramatically she had shifted to center stage. The second discusses sources, methodological issues, and the unavoidable problems involved in preparing a work of this ambitious scope.

European Exemplars of the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

One way to illustrate the change in Europe's relationship to the East between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries is to contrast the lives and preoccupations (as well as fates) of two quintessential scholar/statesmen of their ages: Roger Bacon who lived in the earlier century, and Francis Bacon who lived in the later. The differences in their lives clearly exemplify two central changes: the reversed positions of east and west, and the changing relationship between church and state in Europe.

Roger Bacon, English philosopher, scientist, and educational