CHAPTER 11

Crises and Recovery in Afro-Eurasia, 1300–1500

GLOBAL STORYLINES

- The spread of the Black Death and the collapse of the Mongol empire sets off crises across Afro-Eurasia, with major demographic, political, economic, and cultural consequences.

- Across Afro-Eurasia, continuity in religious beliefs and cultural institutions is balanced with changes in political structures in Europe, the Muslim world, and China.

- In central Afro-Eurasia, new rulers—most notably the Ottomans—rebuild dynasties in place of the Mongols, using a blend of religion, military expansion, administrative control, and cultural tolerance.

- In Western Christendom, new monarchies establish political order, and the Renaissance brings a cultural rebirth to societies devastated by plague.

- In East Asia, the Ming dynasty replaces the Mongol Yuan dynasty, using an elaborate Confucian bureaucracy to oversee infrastructure and long-distance exchange.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- DESCRIBE the nature and origins of the crises spanning Afro-Eurasia during the fourteenth century and ASSESS the magnitude of the crises’ effects, locally and transregionally.

- EXPLAIN the continuities of religious belief systems from the fourteenth through the fifteenth century.
Chapter 11  Crises and Recovery in Afro-Eurasia, 1300–1500

- COMPARE the ways in which regional rulers in postplague Afro-Eurasia attempted to construct unified states, and
  ANALYZE the extent and nature of their successes.

- EXAMINE the ways in which the art and/or architecture of different regions reflected political realities, and
  DESCRIBE the specific themes that communicate these messages to viewers.

- COMPARE the means by which the Iberian kingdoms, the Ottoman Empire, the Ming dynasty, and European
  polities each extended their territory and regional influence.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN
As you prepare to teach the global storylines in Chapter 11, you may find it useful to look over the more in-depth
overview of the main ideas in the chapter’s Conclusion, p. 410. The main points for Tracing the Global Storyline and
additional discussion questions for Making Connections can be found at the end of the chapter on pp. 412–413.

LECTURE OUTLINE
This chapter examines new state and empire building in Afro-Eurasia in the aftermath of the Mongol Empire’s invasions
and, more profoundly, the devastation of the Black Death plague. In response to these crises, new states and empires
emerged by keeping, discarding, adapting, and reshaping old and new institutions and ideas. The Islamic Empires,
Western Christendom, and the Chinese Ming Empire developed distinctive traits and innovative ways of rule, often
borrowed from their neighbors. States in Afro-Eurasia legitimized their rule with dynastic marriage, state religion,
administrative bureaucracies, and commercial expansion and prosperity.

LECTURE IDEAS
Dar al Islam—Lands Ruled by Islam
A timely way to organize a lecture out of this chapter is to use the Safavid Empire and their fervent religiosity as the core
theme. Explore the Safavid relationship with the Ottomans and Sunni Islam, India, and Sufism. Expanding on the
troubled relationship between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shia Safavid Empire begins to clarify the difficulties
between Sunni and Shiite today that so many American students have difficulty understanding. City names central to
recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, such as Herat and Baghdad, were key to controlling the empires in the fifteenth
century as well. Animosity among such groups as the Christian Armenians, the Kurds, and the Ottomans are wounds that originated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and remain open to this day. This lecture allows your students to see the relevance of history to understanding some of the causes of ongoing conflicts.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What were the key differences between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shia Safavid Empire?
2. Did the minority groups like the Kurds and the Armenians play a role in bridging the Safavid Empire and the Ottoman Empire? What, if any?

The Plagues of the Afro-Eurasian World and HIV/AIDS

For a lecture that details the scale and scope of the plagues on the Afro-Eurasian world, not simply Christendom, see William McNeill’s *Plagues and People*, which explores the role of infectious disease throughout the world history. More recent editions conclude with a discussion of the HIV/AIDS crisis and its implications. Linking modern pandemics to the fourteenth-century bubonic plague helps students gain some sense of the scope of pandemics in the past. Also consider drawing on the growing, modern epidemic of tuberculosis in parts of the world. Janet Abu-Lughod’s “World System in the Thirteenth Century: Dead End or Precursor?” from the American Historical Association’s *Essays on Global and Comparative History* and Robert Marks’s *Origins of the Modern World* explain the impact of the plague on the trade networks of the thirteenth century. Marks cites compelling statistical data on the changing populations in Asia as well as Europe as a result of the plague.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What impact did the plagues have on China, India, Central Asia, and Europe, respectively?
2. Why were the plagues so devastating? Why did they not dissipate more quickly?
3. Can parallels be made between the spread of the plagues and the spread of HIV/AIDS? Tuberculosis?

Zheng He’s Treasure Fleets

A lecture on the Ming dynasty’s treasure fleets, commanded by Zheng He in the first half of the fifteenth century, and comparing them to those of Christopher Columbus allows you to explore many of the themes discussed in this chapter. The Chinese Ming dynasty had the most centralized and the most populated empire of the fifteenth century. The recent 600th anniversary of Zheng He’s command has also launched new research, museum exhibits, and publications on his accomplishments and on the fleet itself. These voyages help illustrate the Ming dynasty’s ability to restore order and
stability in China quickly after the Mongolian occupation as well as the devastation of the plague. They illuminate the Middle Kingdom’s technological superiority as well as its diplomatic methods with states in and around the Indian Ocean as compared to that of the Portuguese a century later. Finally, by analyzing the Ming dynasty’s efforts to reinstate the tribute system of earlier Chinese dynasties, the lecture can offer insights into the Chinese view of the Middle Kingdom’s place in the world.


*Suggested Discussion Questions*

1. In what ways was China’s technology superior? Did these technologies help shape or change other societies of the time? How?

2. Describe the tribute system and its role in China and neighboring countries.

3. What were some of the unique advancements found on the ships of Zheng He’s treasure fleets?

**North African and Islamic Influences on the European Renaissance**

Europe’s political and economic revival included the Renaissance, the spectacular cultural achievements during the period of 1430–1550. Scholars and artists developed a humanist approach to arts, science, and literature, which broke the Catholic Church’s monopoly on knowledge and opened the way for secular forms of learning among western Europeans not associated with the Church hierarchy. In addition, explain how the European Renaissance in the Italian city and states was stimulated and influenced by Islamic Empires from North Africa and Southwest Asia.

Jack Goody’s 2004 book cover in *Islam in Europe* has a great photograph of a painting of an African Muslim and a Christian European playing an oud, or a predecessor to the modern guitar. You could show this photograph and ask your students questions about why and how Iberian music was influenced by the Moors and Arabs who conquered them. You could show a clip of the PBS film *Islam: An Empire of Faith*, which discusses how the great Italian theologian, Thomas Aquinas, was influenced by the writings of the Muslim philosopher Averroes, or Ibn Rushd, on the separation of faith and
reason. In fact, the Italian architect of the High Renaissance, Raphael’s 1511 painting School of Athens, pays tribute to the great intellectual “Western” thinkers, includes Averroes. He appears next to Plato and Aristotle, an apparent reminder of the gratitude for this twelfth-century philosopher. Good books for additional reading are as follows:


Jack Goody, 2010. Renaissances: The One or the Many?

Stanley Lane-Poole, 1896, reprinted 2010. The Story of the Moors in Spain.


You could also continue the lecture by discussing how concepts such as humanism, individualism, and sometimes secularism disseminated, and how they spread northward across Europe. Discuss also the shift toward Christian humanism; artists such as Giotto, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo; the architect Palladio; and also wealthy families, like the Medicis who sponsored artists. The spread of the Renaissance occurred because of economic recovery and growing wealth in Europe. Discuss the influence of the Church on these new ideas. Finally, spend some time discussing how, as the Renaissance moved northward, its ideas were shaped and molded to fit different cultures and beliefs. This can be a very visual and aural lecture. Use the music of the time and images of the paintings and buildings. The Metropolitan Museum of Art provides a good selection of images of architecture and paintings at Florence and Central Italy: 1400–1600:

www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/?period=08&region=eustc

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What does the word renaissance mean?

2. Where did some of the ideas of the Renaissance originate? How and why would North African Moors and Muslim Arabs influence western art, thought, music, or culture?

3. As the ideas of the Renaissance moved from Western Europe northward, how were the Italian Renaissance ideas shaped and molded to fit the different beliefs of Northern Europeans? How were Renaissance ideas adapted to shape the society and culture of a region?
CLASS ACTIVITIES

The Ming and Ottoman Empires and Their Architecture

In the aftermath of the plague, two powerful empires emerged in fourteenth-century Afro-Eurasia: the Ottoman Empire and Ming China. By the fifteenth century, these empires were expanding territories, and growing in terms of their population and economy. These two empires built spectacular palaces in the fifteenth century that reflect their wealth, power, society, and worldview. Show images of the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul: (p. 14 / 399)

http://topkapisarayi.gov.tr/en

And the Forbidden City (p. 24 / 409):

www.dpm.org.cn/shtml/2/@/8797.html

Ask students to analyze how these political centers and architecture might represent the worldviews of two major and powerful world empires. You might guide their discussion by asking about their purpose. You might point to specific architectural features, rooms, grounds, and art, and analyze the symbolisms behinds the power, beauty, wealth, and religion or philosophy they convey. For example, the walls surrounding the Forbidden City complex might signify concerns about nomadic invasions or separate the royal dynasties from commoners. You might ask them to compare these fifteenth-century palaces with the seventeenth-century Versailles, France, and eighteenth-century Peterhof, Russia. This is a good prelude to the future growth of European empires; discuss states and empires and their palatial architecture, which represent not only their worldviews but also the image they may want to portray to both their local and global worlds.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Analyze how these political centers and architecture might represent the worldviews of two major and powerful world empires.
2. How do these palaces reflect the specific and distinctive ways in which the Ming and the Ottomans built their empires? What about in terms of marriage, religion, or philosophy, and economy?

The Controversy over Starbucks in the Forbidden City

Starbucks entered the Forbidden City in 2000, and then made a decision to leave in 2007. As one of the most powerful coffee chains in the world, their decision to enter and set up shop in the Forbidden City was mired with controversy. Have students break up into three groups, and debate the issue: one in favor of entering and setting up shop in the Forbidden City, the second in favor of leaving, and the third group representing the Chinese public. If you have a large
class, you can separate the third group into two, and have one represent the American public. There are articles in the Seattle Times and on BBC News to help them maneuver through the issues.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What are the ramifications of setting up a shop in the Forbidden City, and why would it be controversial? What are the historical legacies of the Forbidden City?

2. Why would the coffee company make such a decision to enter and set up shop? Why would they leave?

3. How do these events reflect the historical and continuous tensions between government and merchants?

POPULAR FALLACY

CHINA WAS ALWAYS ISOLATED

Students may often think that China was always isolated from the rest of the world. Some get this idea from being taught that the Great Wall was built to protect Chinese people from invading steppe barbarians. Or, they learn that the geographic features such as the Himalayas, Gobi desert, or Pacific Ocean kept China isolated from other cultures. These claims about China’s isolation probably have their origins in the Cold War period when Chinese Communist leaders in the 1950s and 1960s restricted Chinese contact with some western countries, especially the United States. Students’ belief in China’s isolation can also interfere with their analysis of Chinese responses to western demands for expanded access to the Chinese domestic economy in the nineteenth century, i.e., students might erroneously try to prove that western merchants “opened” China’s borders to trade with the outside world.

Historical Analysis Exercise to Counter Popular Fallacy

Students can alter their preconception of an isolated China if they are presented with historical evidence about Chinese interactions with others from the Han dynasty to the present. You can ask students to compare their evidence of China’s isolation (often students will cite the Great Wall, topographical features, and Chinese antimerchant attitudes) with the examples below of China’s integration into Afro-Eurasian networks of exchange from c. 100 CE to c. 1600 CE. This exercise could be given to students either as a handout that they analyze individually or in small groups before launching into the content of this chapter. Or, you can lead their analysis by presenting the evidence as consecutive slides perhaps with images of some of the evidence. (Sources for suggested images are in parentheses.) The goal should be to guide students toward recognizing the lack of evidence for their misconceptions about the historical topic and subsequently seeing the value of the evidence about Chinese integration into Afro-Eurasian networks of exchange from c. 100 CE to c. 1600 CE.
Directions to student: Evaluate this evidence to determine whether China was isolated from or integrated into networks of exchange in Afro-Eurasia from c. 100 to c. 1600 CE.

EVIDENCE 1

Both Valerie Hansen’s *Open Empire* and Nicola di Cosmo’s *Ancient China and Its Enemies* provide evidence of the uninterrupted flow of people and goods along the borders between China and its neighbors. The two monographs demonstrate that the Great Wall usually served as a customs checkpoint from the Han to the Qing periods. In addition, they explain that the wall might better be considered a series of connected forts whose soldiers protected farmers on both sides of the wall. The Chinese soldiers also aided officials overseeing the entry and exit of merchants. Finally, it is important to consider that the Great Wall’s location was limited to the northwest border to manage commercial and diplomatic affairs with steppe nomads and actually was not an effective barrier to invasions. Interactions with foreigners along the other Chinese borders were regulated in the same way but without any walls.

EVIDENCE 2

Chinese participation in Afro-Eurasian networks of exchange is mostly clearly seen in the activities along the trade routes. Chinese products such as porcelain, silk, paper, and tea were much in demand along the land and sea routes of the Silk Roads from the Han through the Yuan imperial periods. In addition to their domestic production, Chinese artisans created porcelain and silk specifically for foreign markets and Chinese merchants sought products such as spices from Southeast Asia and horses from Central Asia. There is evidence in a Greco-Roman source, *Periplus of the Red Sea*, of Han dynasty silk in South Asian entrepôts (trading sites). Even stronger evidence of the dominance of Chinese goods in Afro-Eurasian trade networks can be seen in Tang and Ming dynasties’ porcelain made for export. You can see examples of the porcelain at: http://www.asia.si.edu/shipwrecked/downloads/04Krahl.pdf

EVIDENCE 3

In the first millennium CE, Buddhist pilgrims from China such as the monks Xuanzang and Faxian, used well-traveled land and sea routes to get to India and back with Buddhist texts in the original Sanskrit. They left records of their journeys in Chinese, and Faxian’s journey was turned into a popular Chinese story, *Journey to the West*, with its famous character of the Monkey King. Excerpts from the monks’ travels can be found at: http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/travel_records.pdf
EVIDENCE 4

The commander and pilots of the Ming naval voyages from 1405 to 1433 brought with them a twenty-one-foot-long sailing chart labeled with compass bearings, major ports, and other landmarks of the Indian Ocean region. A reproduction of this map can be found on pp. 94–5 in Louise Levathes When China Ruled the Seas. Clearly, the Ming naval voyages were following the nautical and mercantile paths laid down during the mercantile activities of the Song period.

In 1525, the Ming government issued an edict forbidding Chinese to build ocean-going ships, but Chinese merchants turned to smuggling or piracy to avoid the penalties associated with this law. Moreover, in 1571 when Ming policy required that all taxes be paid in silver, extensive trade for silver with merchants from Japan and with Spanish merchants in the Philippines became essential.

Assessment

To assess whether students now understand that China was not always isolated, consider asking them to respond to a short answer question. One question might be “evaluate to what extent China was integrated into networks of exchange in Afro-Eurasia from c. 100 CE to c. 1600 CE.” You might consider having students quickly grade each other’s responses to generate questions they might still have about the reliability of the evidence or how to construct a historical argument using evidence.

RECOMMENDED FILMS

- Islam: Empire of Faith (three parts, 180 minutes, 2000). This Gardner/PBS production, narrated by Ben Kingsley, has achieved wide acclaim, and rightly so, as one of the best documentaries made on Islamic Empires. Part one includes background on Muhammad and how the religion started, part two is on the rise of Islamic nomadic empires, and part three discusses the rise of the Ottoman Empire, with stories of Suleyman. PBS has provided a Web site of the same name with teacher resources to use in conjunction with the film.

- Cities of Light: Rise and Fall of Islamic Spain (120 minutes, 2007). This documentary was created by Unity Productions Foundation to promote dialogues about religious diversity and coexistence. There also is a Web site with background information on the making of the film along with twelve lesson plans about the geography, literature, technology transfer, and religions in Islamic Spain as well as historiographical issues on the significance of Islamic Spain: http://www.islamicspain.tv/For-Teachers/LessonPlans.htm
Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975). This satirical film spoofs the story of King Arthur and his knights searching for the Holy Grail in medieval England. There is one comic segment lasting about two minutes during which one character moans “I’m not dead yet” that you can use to show the effects of the Black Death in one village.

Warrior Collection (four DVDs, 240 minutes). These DVDs are considered the most important semihistorical films to have been made in Korea. All of the stories are set in fourteenth-century China during the Ming dynasty, and they relay the tense relationship between China and Korea. The films include Bichunmoo and The Warrior, or Musa. The Warrior is the most readily available in the United States. This visually stunning, historical fiction epic follows a delegation of Korean diplomats across the desert to the capital of China on a diplomatic mission. It recounts the trials and adventures of the group as they travel across this inhospitable land. The film has been praised for its high degree of historical accuracy, period pieces, and, interestingly, the fact that everyone in the film speaks the appropriate languages with interpreters, as they would have in the fourteenth century. The film depicts the shift from the Yuan to the Ming dynasty, and the cultural and social exchanges and relationships among the Mongols, Koreans, and Chinese.

**RECOMMENDED READINGS**


Jack Goody, 2010. *Renaissances: The One or the Many?*


**RECOMMENDED WEB SITES**

*Archnet*
A digital library of Middle Eastern architecture, with an extensive collection of photographs, information, and scholarly resources on cities, sites, and buildings, targeting an international community of scholars, students, and professionals working in architecture, planning, and related fields

[https://archnet.org/lobby/](https://archnet.org/lobby/)

*Chinese Cultural Studies: Images*
Multiple images and maps of China


*Islam: Empire of Faith*
The PBS documentary video also provides an extensive Web site on Islam, with classroom lesson suggestions targeted for K–12 (but may be adapted for college as well) and photographs of monuments

[www.pbs.org/empires/islam/eduk12plan.html](http://www.pbs.org/empires/islam/eduk12plan.html)

*Islamic Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)*
General information with numerous images and links to other sources

[www.lacma.org/islamic_art/intro.htm](http://www.lacma.org/islamic_art/intro.htm)

*Mongols in World History*
Columbia University’s Weatherhead East Asia Institute has an initiative, called Asia for Educators (AFE), for hosting a web resource for educators and students on Asia, and specifically the history of the Mongols

[http://afe.easia.columbia.edu](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu)

Chapter 11  Crises and Recovery in Afro-Eurasia, 1300–1500

Muslim Spain
General information about Spanish Moors

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/spain_1.shtml

The Renaissance
Annenberg Foundation teacher resources on the Renaissance, as well as numerous other topics

www.learner.org/exhibits/renaissance/

Sultan’s Lost Treasures
PBS Web site on the Ming dynasty and Zheng He; includes teacher resources

www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sultan/

The Black Death
This Edsitement unit offers lesson activities and assessments on the path and effects of the Black Death in Europe

http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/path-black-death

World History for Us All
This unit utilizes primary sources for students to analyze the causes, routes, and effects of the bubonic plague pandemic in Afro-Eurasia in the 1300s.

http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu/units/five/closeup/Era05_closeup551.php