

# An incomplete snapshot of the 15<sup>th</sup> century

- It is very important to remember that civilizations do not operate in isolation - in ancient times Greeks interacted with Romans and Egyptians. Delegations from China were entertained in Rome, and traders connected vast African civilizations with India and beyond. **Avoid the temptation to compartmentalize, and therefore isolate, communities.**



- Between 1000 and 1500 CE (Common Era), the peoples of the eastern hemisphere (Africa, Asia and Europe) traveled, traded, communicated, and interacted more regularly and intensively than ever before.
- For centuries the **Silk Road** (a series of transportation routes heavily influenced by Islamic civilizations) connected the three continents, allowing for the flow of knowledge, faith, technology and trade. This was also the way in which things like the Bubonic Plaque traveled from Asia into Europe.

For the vast majority of the population in antiquity, horizons were decidedly local—with trade and interaction between people being carried out over short distances. Nevertheless, the webs of communities wove into each other to create a world that was complex, where tastes and ideas were shaped by products, artistic principles and influences thousands of miles apart.

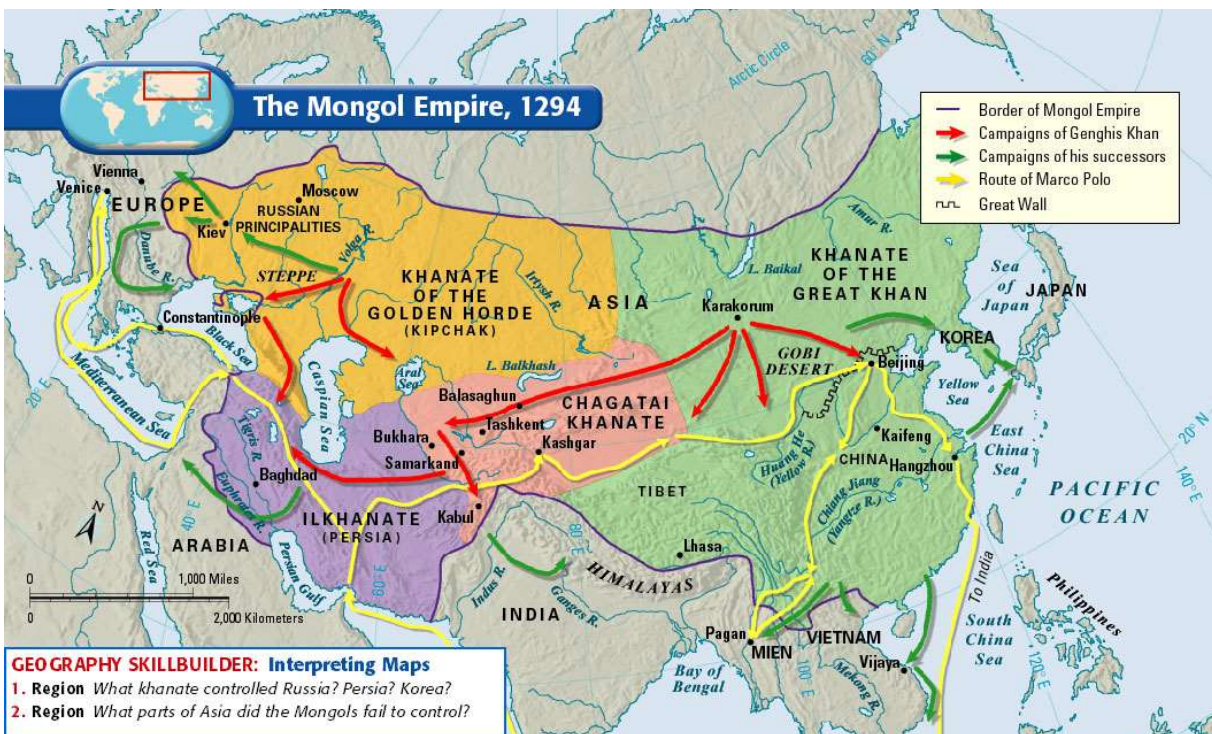
Two millennia ago, silks made by hand in China were being worn by the rich and powerful in Carthage and other cities in the Mediterranean, while pottery manufactured in southern France could be found in England and in the Persian Gulf. Spices and condiments grown in India were being used in the kitchens of Xinjiang, as they were in those of Rome. Buildings in northern Afghanistan carried inscriptions in Greek, while horses from Central Asia were being ridden proudly thousands of miles away to the east.

It is easy to mould the past into a shape that we find convenient and accessible. But the ancient world was much more sophisticated and inter-linked than we sometimes like to think. Seeing Rome as the progenitor of western Europe overlooks the fact that it consistently looked to and in many ways was shaped by influences from the east. The world of antiquity was very much a precursor of the world as we see it today—vibrant, competitive, efficient and energetic. A belt of towns formed a chain spanning Asia. The west had begun to look east, and the east had begun to look west. Together with increasing traffic connecting India with the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, the ancient Silk Roads of antiquity were coursing with life.

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*, (Vintage Books, 2015), 26.

- This transportation route disintegrated in 1453 with the **Fall of Constantinople** (renamed Istanbul in 1930) to the Ottoman Empire. Constantinople's collapse signaled the end of the Byzantine Empire (the Eastern Roman Empire).
  - Once Constantinople fell, the Ottoman Empire absorbed modern-day Greece, Bulgaria & Romania. **The capture of Constantinople signaled the closure of the Silk Road to Europeans**, who would soon take to the sea in order to find a direct route to China.
- Cross-cultural interactions were too numerous to list them all, but highlight that there were all kinds of exchanges going on.
  - Many large cities had quarters filled with foreign traders: Khanbaliq (modern-day Beijing), Baghdad, Venice, Timbuktu, and Cairo (to name a few).
- The city of Melaka (modern-day Malaysia) was founded in 1390, and by the end of the 15th century was reported to have over 80 languages being spoken on its streets.



- The massive **Mongol Empire** (visited by the famous Venetian Marco Polo via the Silk Road in 1271 - he also visited, with his family, Sumatra, India and Arabia) covered vast tracks of Asia and the Middle East - it even included modern-day Moscow and Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The invasion by the Mongol Empire is critical to understanding the formation of modern Russia and Ukraine.

- There was much communication between the Mongol Court and the Western European Kingdoms who considered a military alliance against their common Muslim enemies.
  - Roman Catholic Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) dispatched a series of envoys who invited the Mongol khans to convert to Christianity and join Europeans in a crusade against the Muslims. The khans declined the invitation, proposing instead that the pope and European Christians submit to Mongol rule or be destroyed.
  - Mongol traders spread gunpowder technologies west from China. Gunpowder reached Europe by way of Mongol-controlled Russia by the mid-thirteenth century. Canons emerged the next century from China to Europe.
  - DYK: The magnetic compass was invented in China and spread through the Indian Ocean basin (Europeans began using it during the 12th century). China is also credited with giving the world the "sternpost rudder."
- Mongol rule in China was replaced by the **Ming Dynasty** under the Hongwu Emperor (1368-1398) - the first emperor moved to centralize authority more tightly than ever before in Chinese history. Ming emperors ruled directly at the head of a strong central government.
  - The Ming dynasty sought to expand its rule out into the world and sponsored a series of oceanic explorations from 1405-1433.



- At the head of these explorations was the Muslim eunuch admiral Zheng He. His first voyage comprised of 317 vessels accompanied by nearly 28,000 troops. Zheng He visited southeast Asia, India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and East Africa (Kenya). He even brought a zebra and giraffe back to show the emperor. In Ceylon, Zheng He built a monument honouring Buddha, Allah (SWT), and Vishnu.

*The significant difference in size between the Chinese vessels and their European contemporaries.*

- These expeditions ended abruptly after imperial officials destroyed much of the nautical charts Zheng He had prepared. The expeditions were seen as too expensive, and resources were needed to repel a renewed invasion by the Mongols and further develop China's agricultural endeavours.



*Portuguese Sailors Saluting the Manikongo of Congo from Descriptio Regni Africani, 1598*

- Numerous kingdoms and empires thrived in continental Africa, including the **Kingdom of Kongo**. Centered around the massive Congo River, the Kingdom of Kongo was founded at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.
  - The capital and its surrounding area were densely settled—more so than other towns in and near the kingdom. This allowed the *manikongo* (king of Kongo) to keep close at hand the manpower and supplies necessary to wield impressive power and centralize the state.<sup>3</sup>
  - Europeans could not penetrate into the interior of the continent, so they engaged in trading relationships with Nations along the coastline. The Portugese were the first to do so in 1483.
    - Nzinga a Nkuwu was the *manikongo*. In 1491 both he and his son, Mvemba a Nzinga, were baptized and assumed Christian names—João I Nzinga a Nkuwu and Afonso I Mvemba a Nzinga, respectively. Afonso, who became *manikongo* c.1509, extended Kongo's borders, centralized administration, and forged strong ties between Kongo and Portugal.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Kongo." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 18, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kongo-historical-kingdom-Africa>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

- **Islam** could be found across India, southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, thanks to Sufi mystics (Sufi's did not insist on a strict, concrete understanding of Islam - they even tolerated reverence of traditional deities, whom the Sufis treated as manifestations of Allah (SWT<sup>5</sup>) and his powers.

- The troubadours of Western Europe drew on the poetry, music and love songs of Muslim performers when developing the literature of courtly love.
- Muslim traders introduced new foods (citrus fruits and Asian strains of rice) to sub-Saharan Africa. They also introduced cotton to the region, and by 1500 was the principal textile produced in sub-Saharan Africa.
  - Muslim traders also introduced sugarcane to southwest Asia and northern Africa. It was these traders that introduce refined sugar to Europeans during the crusades (Europeans had previously used honey and fruit as sweeteners).
  - Think of our learning from *BBC Select's The Silk Road*.



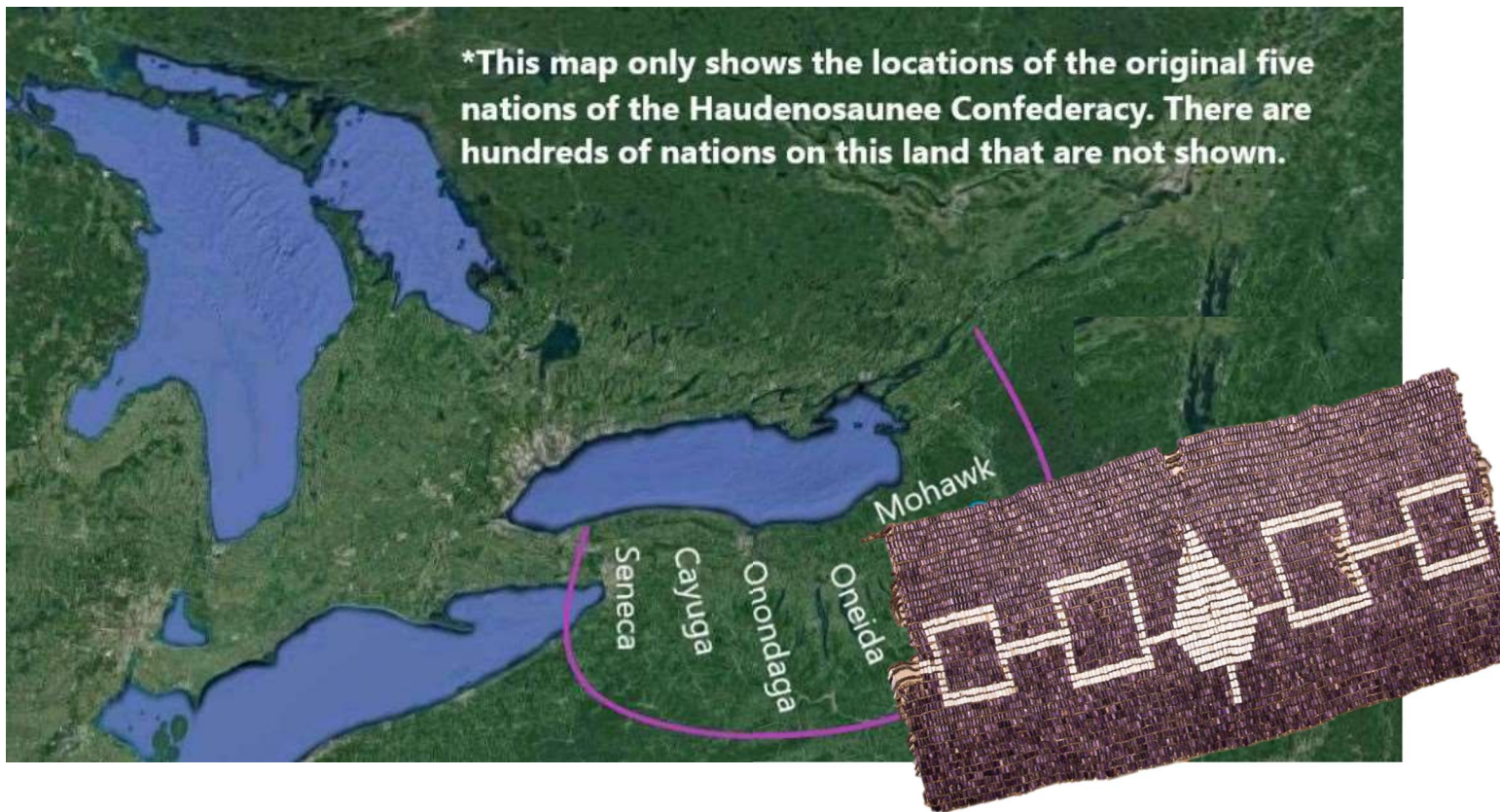
- By 1500, **India's** population had reached 105,000,000. The sub-continent was filled with various regions ruled by powerful maharaja's, sultans and local families. The caste system served as one of the most powerful organizing features in Indian society.
  - The southern coastline was dotted with trading posts and served as meeting points for traders from all over the Indian, Persian, Arab, East African, Chinese, and European worlds.
  - By 1500 India's Muslim population numbered 25,000,000 people.

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<sup>5</sup> Subhanahu wa ta'ala ("Glory to Him, the Exalted" or "Glorious and Exalted Is He").



- In North America various Indigenous civilizations thrived. The arrival of the Peacemaker united the nations along the southern shore of Lake Ontario (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk) into the **Haudenosaunee Confederacy** (meaning People of the long house). The website of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy states: *The confederacy, made up of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas was intended as a way to unite the nations and create a peaceful means of decision making. Through the confederacy, each of the nations of the Haudenosaunee are united by a common goal to live in harmony. Each nation maintains its own council with Chiefs chosen by the Clan Mother and deals with its own internal affairs but allows the Grand Council to deal with issues affecting the nations within the confederacy.*
- The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is often considered the oldest participatory democracy in the world (the Confederacy's constitution is believed to be a model for the American and Canadian constitutions).



- **Europe** was a fragmented continent, comprised of a series of regional states rather than a centralized Empire. The bubonic plague had devastated the region in a series of waves.
  - Powerful monarchies began emerging in the 15th century through the emergence of new taxes on their subjects to supplement rulers' incomes & the maintenance of standing armies.



Granada and its surrounding states in 1360. The Atlas To Freeman's Historical Geography, Edited by J.B. Bury, Longmans Green and Co. Third Edition 1903

- The process of state building was most dramatic in Spain where the marriage in 1469 of Fernando of Aragon and Isabel of Castile united the two wealthiest and important Iberian realms. With a massive standing army, a united Kingdom of Spain was created which initiated (what they called) the *Reconquista* by conquering the Muslim kingdom of Granada and absorbing it into their realm in **1492**.

- A new concept of the “modern state” was developing at this time in Europe which began to see the concept of the “state” as being a distinct political creation with its own systems (government, military, and other “organs”) that can enforce its sovereignty over a particular people and/or territory.

## The King's Bodies<sup>6</sup>:



*Charles III following the moment of coronation – a religious ceremony where The King is invested with priestly regalia, as well as the Crown of St. Edward.*



*His Majesty King Charles III "in State," or manifesting the "body politic."*

*The State, with rights and powers existing in law, that is immortal.*



*Charles Windsor-Mountbatten "in his personal capacity," or his "body natural."*

*A Human, who is an individual and fallible, as well as mortal.*

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<sup>6</sup> This theory comes from a 1957 book by Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*.