CH 12: The Worlds of the Fifteenth Century
Paleolithic Persistence, Agricultural Village Societies, & Herding Peoples
World of the 15th Century: Remarkably Varied

Types of societies in the 15th Century:

- Bands of **Hunters & Gatherers**
- Villages of **agricultural** peoples
- Newly emerging **chiefdoms** or **small states**
- **Nomadic / pastoral** communities
- Established **civilizations & empires**

**Change Over Time:**

Balance among these distinctive kinds of societies at the end of post classical millennium (1500) was quite different than it had been at the beginning (500).
Paleolithic Persistence

Paleolithic (old stone-age) peoples:
- All of Australia
- Much of Siberia
- Arctic coastlands
- Parts of Africa
- Parts of the Americas

Had changed over time, though more slowly than their agricultural counterparts

Had a history, although most history books largely ignore them after the age of agriculture arrived

Although ancient, Paleolithic persistence was still a sizeable & variable presence in the world of the 15th century.
Many separate groups (approx. 250 of them)
Still practiced gathering & hunting way of life in the 15th century, pattern continued will after Europeans arrived in the late 18th cent.

Over many 1000s of years, assimilated various material items/cultural practices from outsiders:
- canoes, fish hooks, netting techniques, art, rituals, mythology

Despite presence of farmers in nearby New Guinea, no agricultural practices penetrated the Australian mainland.

Aboriginal Australians are the oldest continuous culture on Earth
Northwest American Paleolithic Persistence

Very different kind of gathering & hunting societies flourished in the 15th century along the NW coast of North America:

- Chinookan, Tulalip, Skagit & others

Distinguished NW coast peoples from Australia:
- Permanent village settlements
- Considerable economic specialization
- Ranked societies that sometimes included slavery
- Chiefdoms dominated by clan leasers
- Extensive storage of food
Village Societies: North America, Amazon River Basin, SE Asia, & Africa (south of equator)

- Different than hunters & gatherers
- Far more numerous
- Avoided incorporation into larger empires or civilizations
- Had not developed their own city or state-based societies
- Living in small village-based communities & organized in terms of kinship relations
- Created societies largely without oppressive political authority
- Societies w/o class inequalities
- Societies w/o seclusion of women (common in civilizations)
Iroquois Confederacy: Historically powerful & important northeast Native American confederacy.

The Great Peace: 15th cent. or earlier, bringing together 5 distinct nations in southern Great Lakes area into "Great League of Peace."

Historians in the 20th century have suggested Iroquois system of govt influenced development of Articles of Confederation or US Constitution, but there is not a consensus.

Regardless, the Iroquois also gave expression to values of limited government, social equality, and personal freedom, concepts that some European colonists found highly attractive.
3 quite different patterns of change emerged: Each began from base farming village societies & productivity was generating larger populations in forested region of what is now S. Nigeria in W. Africa

**Yoruba-speaking people**: Rival city-states emerged each within a walled city

**Oba** (king): Some were women, performed both religious & political functions.

As in ancient Mesopotamia or classical Greece, no single state or empire encompassed all of Yorubaland.
**Benin**: Small, highly centralized territorial state, emerged by 15th century

Ruled by a warrior king: **Ewuare**

He conquered 200 towns & villages in process of founding the new state.

Administrative chiefs replaced heads of kinship groups as major political authorities

Ewuare sponsored extensive trading missions & patronized artists
Igbo peoples a “Stateless Society”: East of Niger River, dense population & extensive trading networks might have given rise of states

Rejected kingship & state-building: “The Igbo have no kings”

Yoruba, Bini, & Igbo barely registered in the larger civilizations of the Afro-Eurasian world, but soon the Transatlantic slave trade would substantially change their societies.
**Nomadic Pastoral Peoples: Timur & Turkic Invasions**

**Pastoral Peoples:** Imposed directly & dramatically on civilizations more than hunting & gathering or agricultural village societies

Mongol incursion, along with the enormous empire to which it gave rise, was one in a long series of challenges from the steppes, but not the last.

**Timur:** As Mongol Empire disintegrated, he lead a brief attempt to restore it in the late 14th & 15th century.

Turkic warrior, born in what is now Uzbekistan & known in West as **Tamerlane**.
Ferocity that matched or exceeded that of his model, Genghis Khan, Timur’s army of nomads brought immense devastation yet again to Russia, Persia, & India.

Timur died in 1405 while preparing to invade China.

Conflicts amongst his successors prevented a lasting empire, but did spawn a sophisticated elite culture that combined Turkic & Persian elements. The center of this culture was the capital at Samarkand.

In the centuries that followed, the expanding Russian & Chinese empires swallowed the remnants of Timur’s conquest.

15th century in Asia witnessed massive Ming dynasty voyages into Indian Ocean, last major nomadic power in Timur’s empire, & flourishing of the maritime city of Malacca.
Pastoral peoples stayed independent of established empires several centuries longer than nomads of Inner Asia.

Long Lasting: Until 19th century when European colonial states swallowed them up.

**Fulbe:** West Africa’s largest pastoral society who resented subordination and the way of life of agricultural peoples.

Sense of cultural superiority became even more pronounced as Fulbe adopted Islam. Eventually gave rise to new states, ruled by Fulbe.