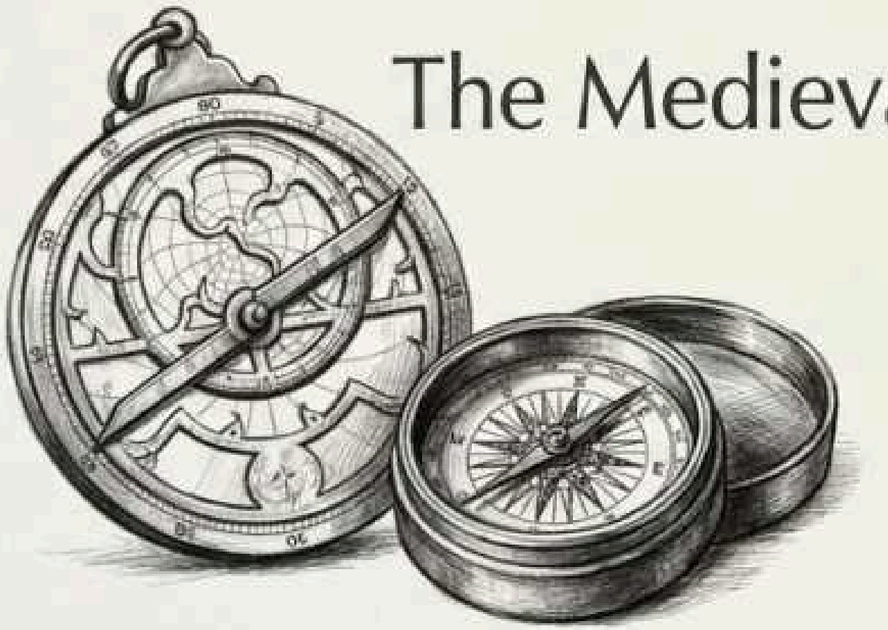
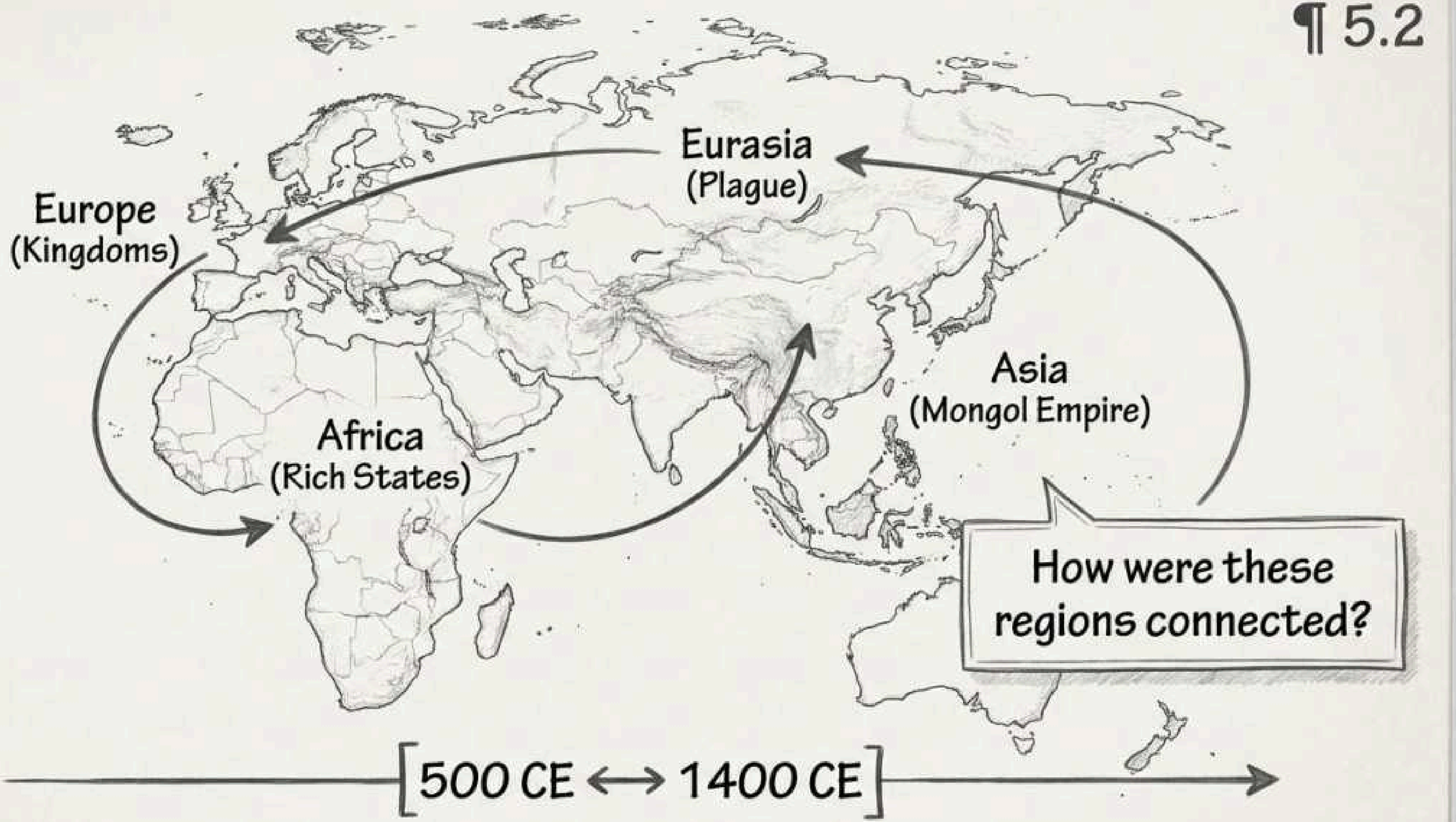
HIST 101 B — Lecture 5

The Medieval World and the Mongols




Eurasia
(Plague)
Europe
(Kingdoms)
Asia
(Mongol Empire)
Africa
(Rich States)
How were these regions connected?
500 CE ⟷ 1400 CE

Fall of Rome → Division of Kingdoms

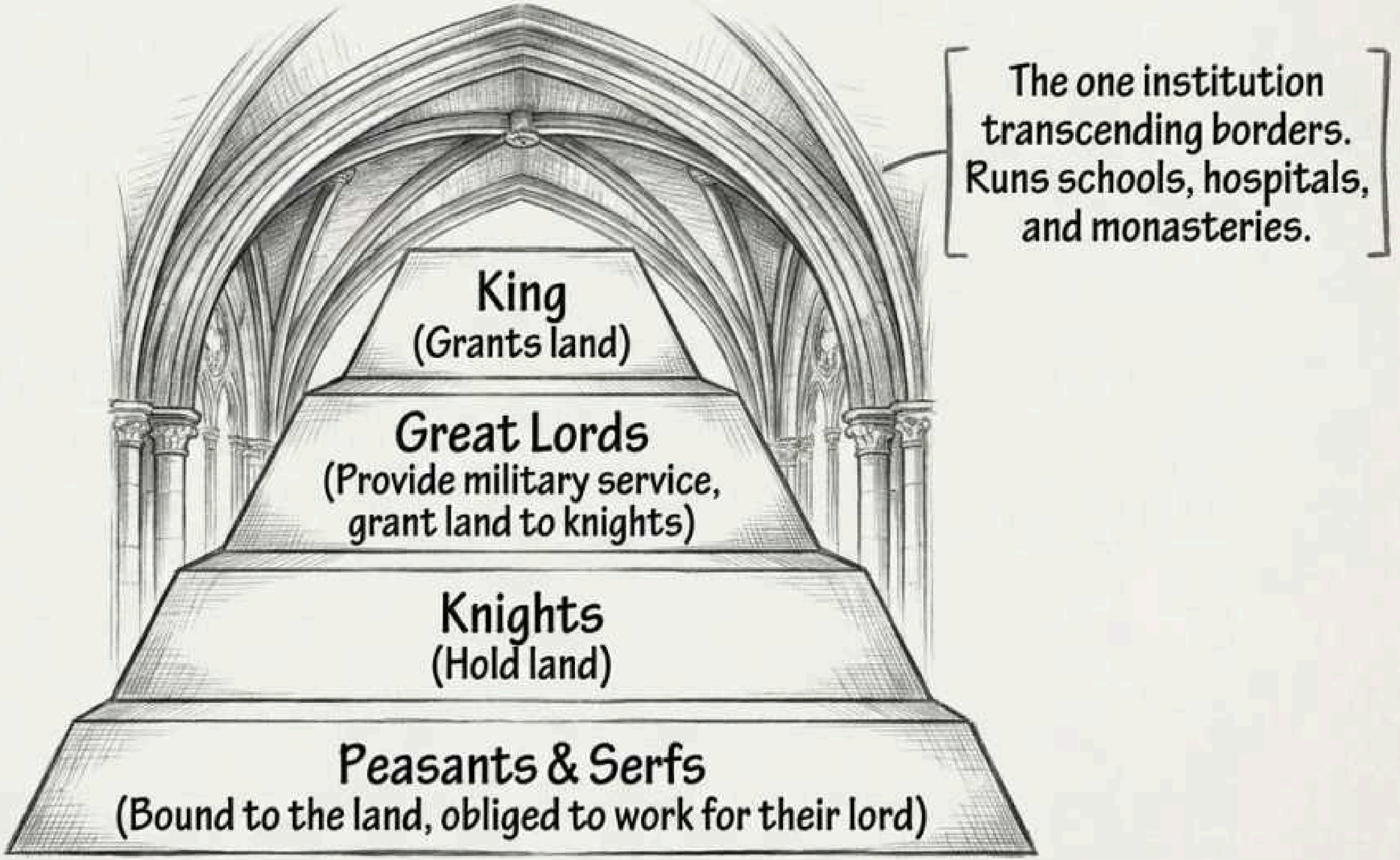


The Franks: Charlemagne crowned Emperor (800 CE). Empire splits post-death.



The Vikings: Raids begin at Lindisfarne (793 CE). Added to disorder, but built lasting trade and settler communities.

The Catholic Church



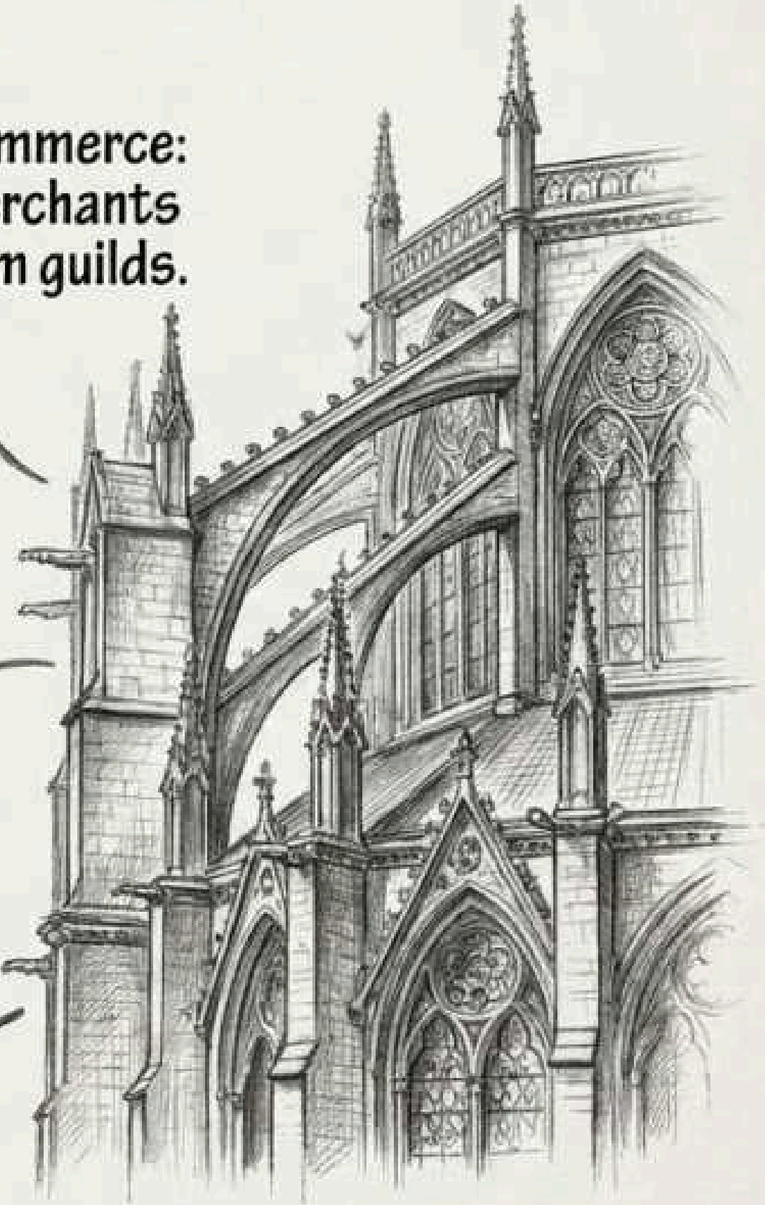
The one institution transcending borders. Runs schools, hospitals, and monasteries.

(New Tools + Crop Rotation) → ↑ Yields → ↑ Population → Town Revival

Commerce: Merchants form guilds.

Intellectual: Universities emerge (Bologna, Paris, Oxford);

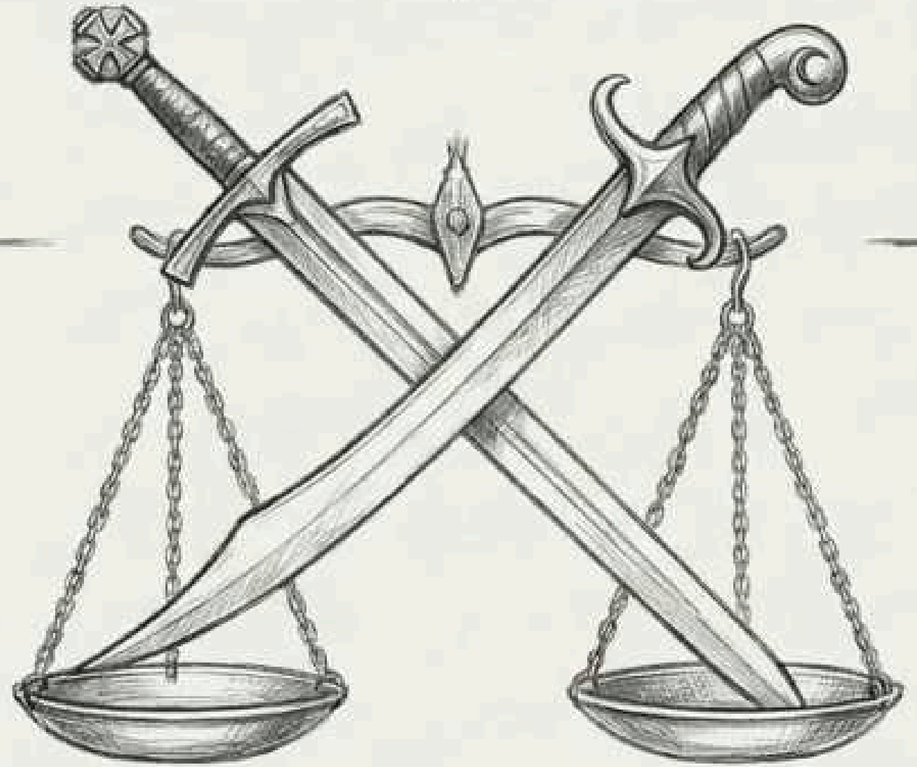
Political constraint: Magna Carta signed (1215) in England — limits the ruler's power.



1095 (Pope Urban II calls expedition) → 1099 (Latin army captures Jerusalem) → 1291 (Final crusader stronghold falls).

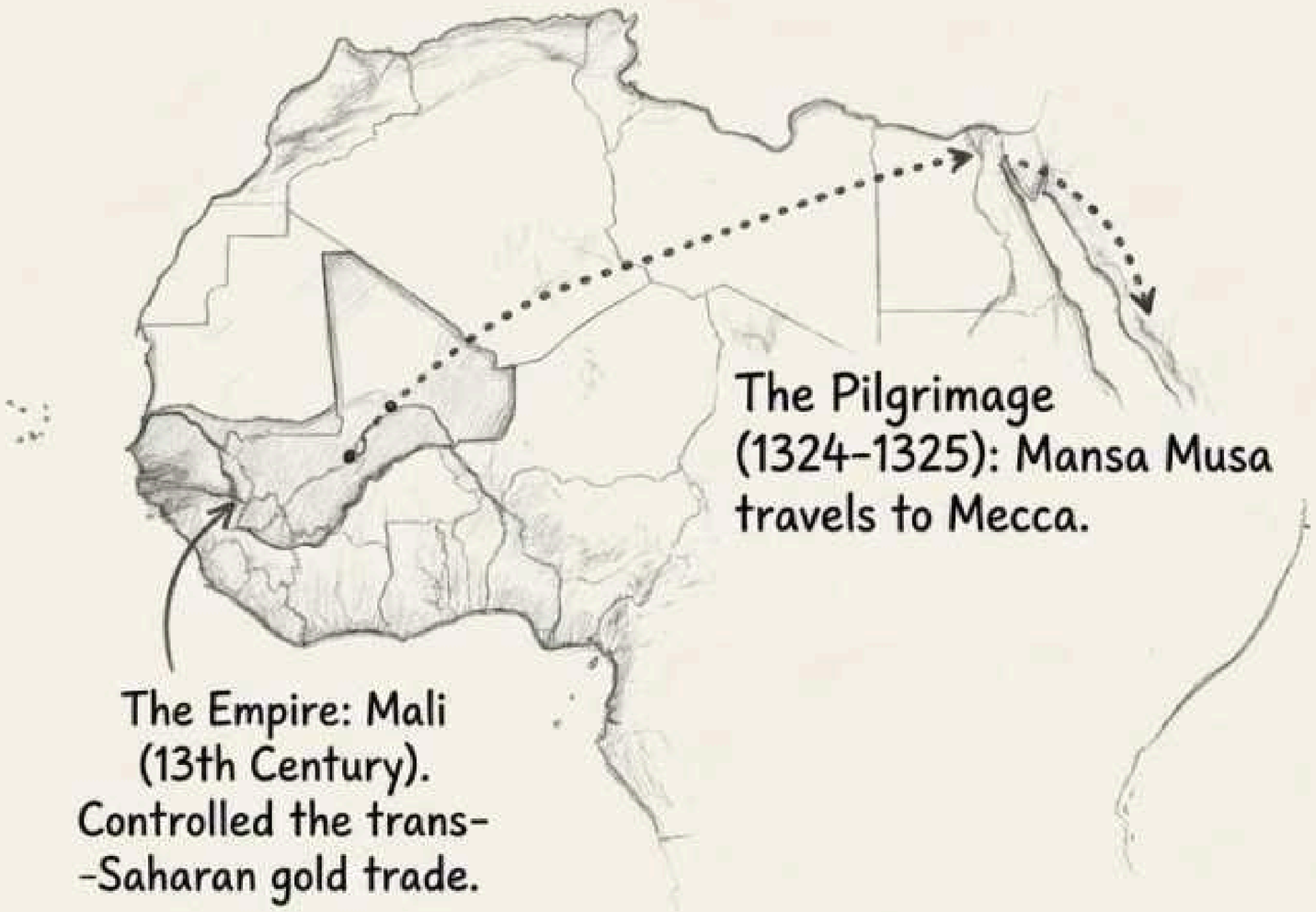
Divergent Outcomes

For Europeans: Opened lucrative trade networks.



For Muslims: Remembered as a violent foreign invasion.

The Reality: Massive civilian slaughter; Christians often fought other Christians.



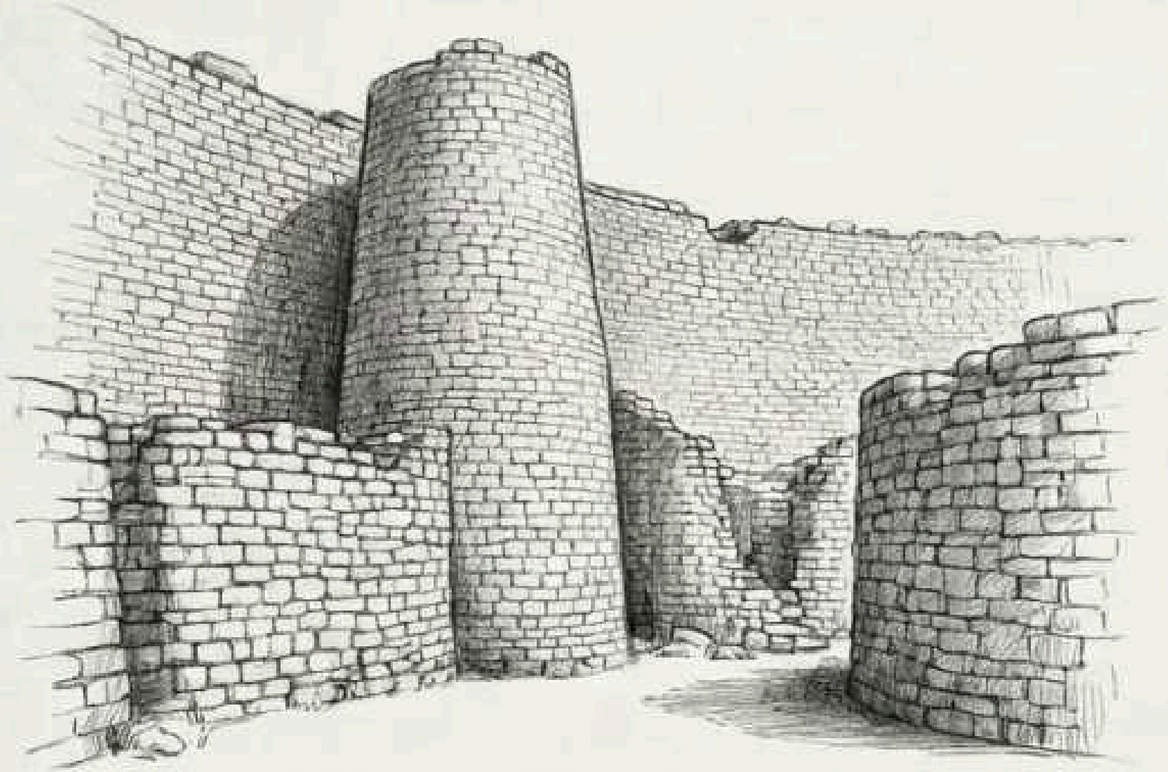
The Empire: Mali (13th Century). Controlled the trans-Saharan gold trade.

The Pilgrimage (1324–1325): Mansa Musa travels to Mecca.



Economic Impact: Gave away so much gold in Cairo that the market value plummeted for years.

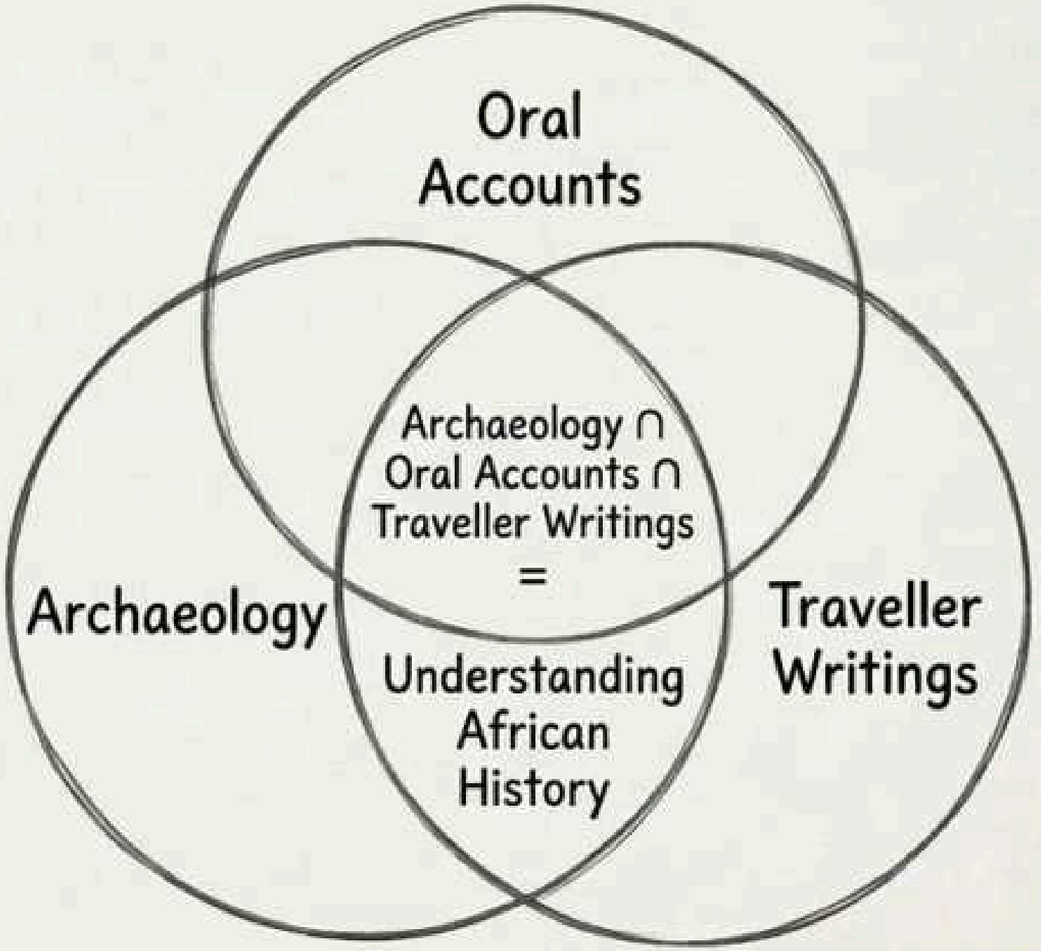
Cultural Legacy: Brought scholars home; Timbuktu transformed into a center of learning with vast libraries and a university.



Great Zimbabwe (1100–1450): Impressive stone city; traded gold and ivory with the Swahili coast.

Horn of Africa: Christian Ethiopia maintains independence.

The Historian's Method





The Leader: Temujin unites tribes in 1206
→ Takes title Genghis Khan (“Universal Ruler”)

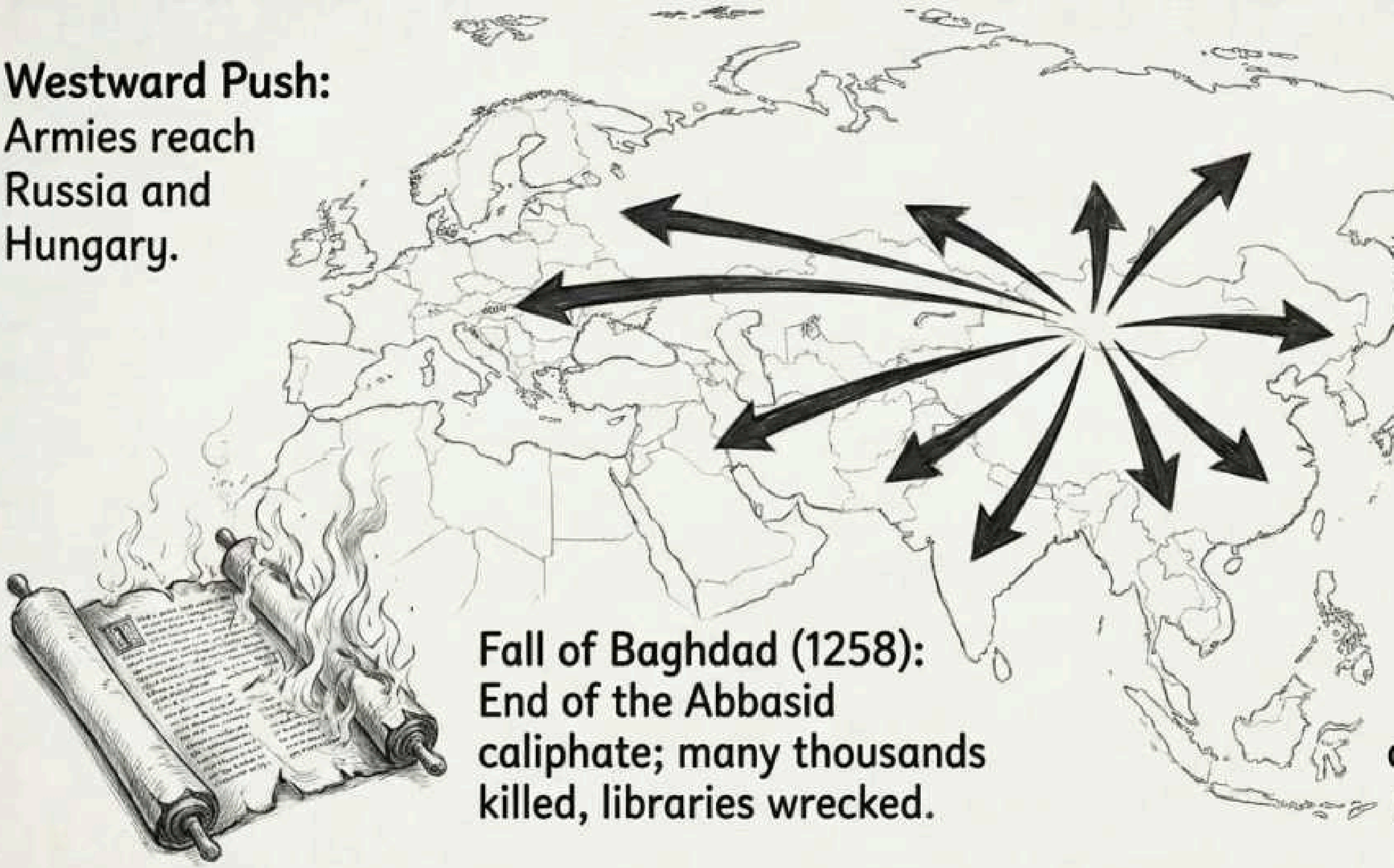
$$\sum \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{Fast Cavalry + Spies +} \\ \text{Terror + Clever Tactics} \end{array} \right) = \text{Conquest}$$

Binary Policy Matrix:

Surrender = City Spared.	Resistance = Complete Destruction.

Initial Reach: Conquered northern China, Central Asia, and Persia within his lifetime.

Westward Push:
Armies reach Russia and Hungary.



Eastward Push:
Grandson Kublai Khan proclaims Yuan Dynasty in China (1271), completes conquest of the Song (1279).

Fall of Baghdad (1258):
End of the Abbasid caliphate; many thousands killed, libraries wrecked.

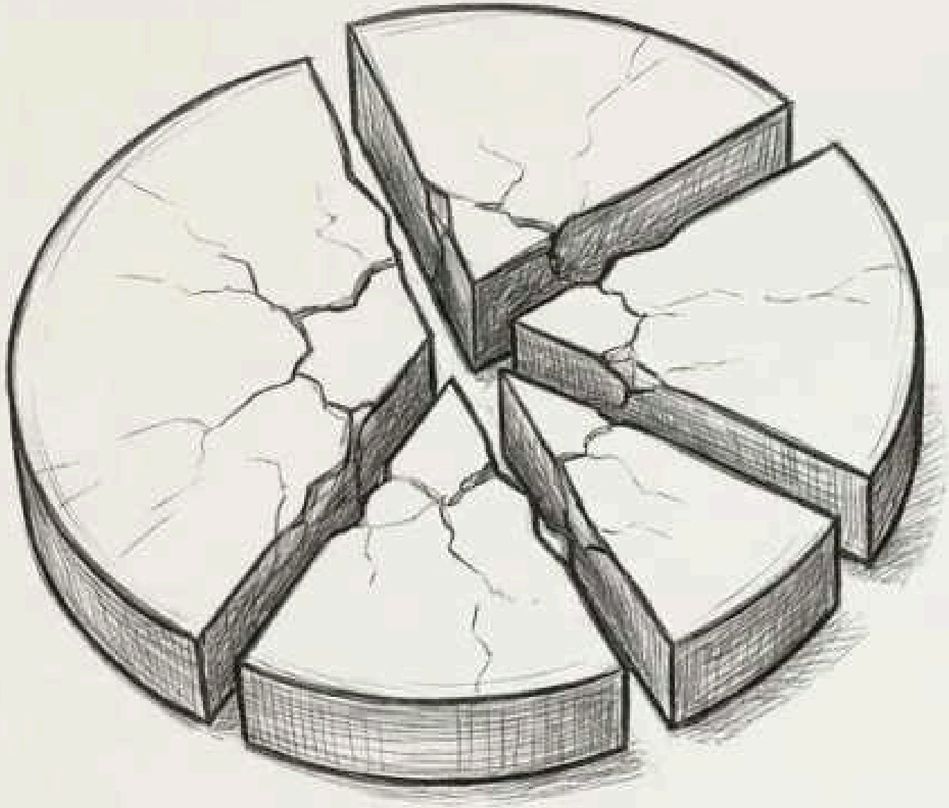
The Result: The largest connected land empire in human history.

- **Pax Mongolica** (The Mongol Peace): Merchants and envoys safely cross Eurasia under Mongol protection.
- **Key Envoy:** Italian merchant Marco Polo serves Kublai Khan; his accounts startle Europe.

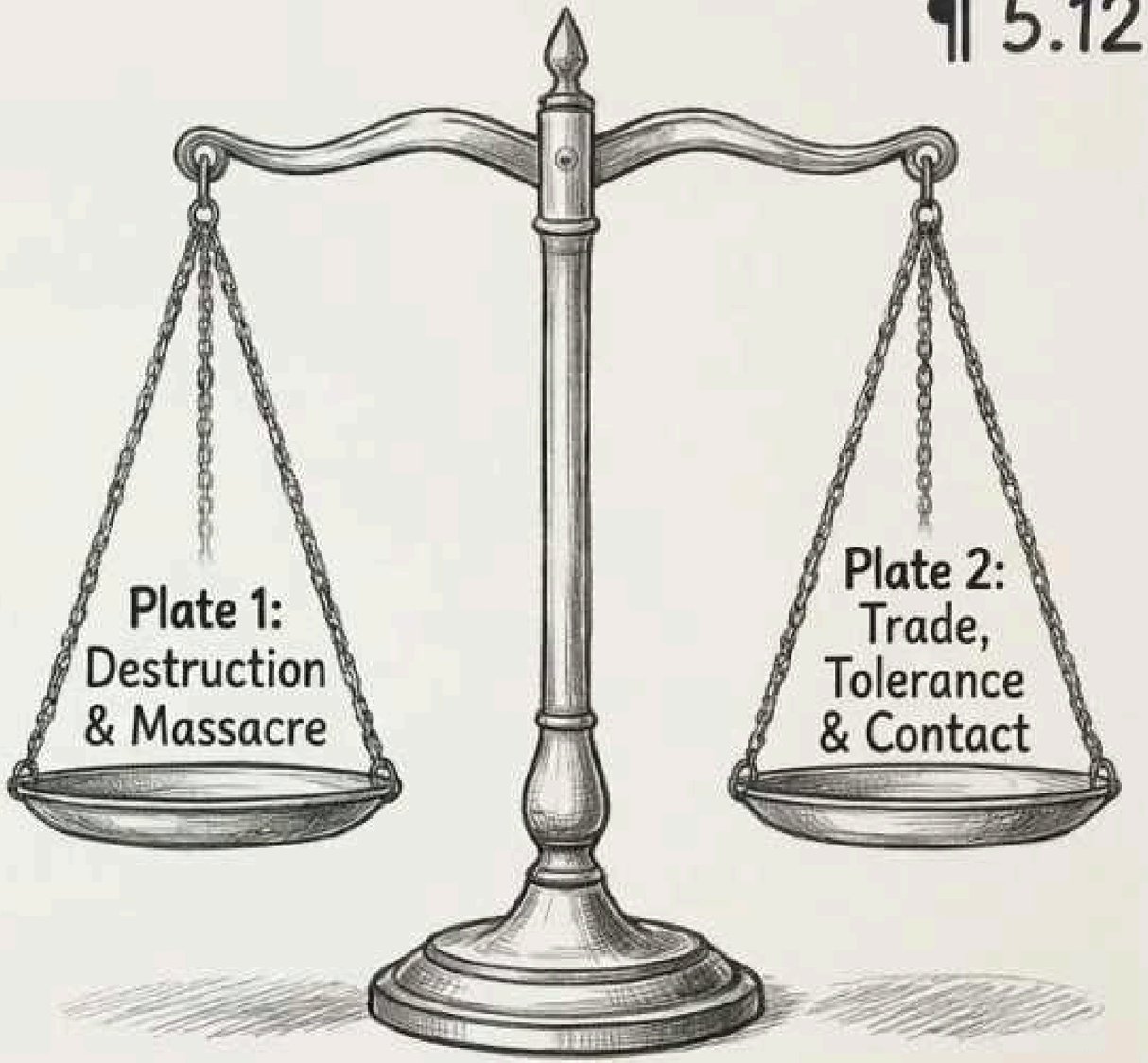


Tech Transfer Vector (East ➡ West): Gunpowder, Printing, Compass.

> **Warning:** The empire was a channel for ideas and goods—but also a channel for disease.



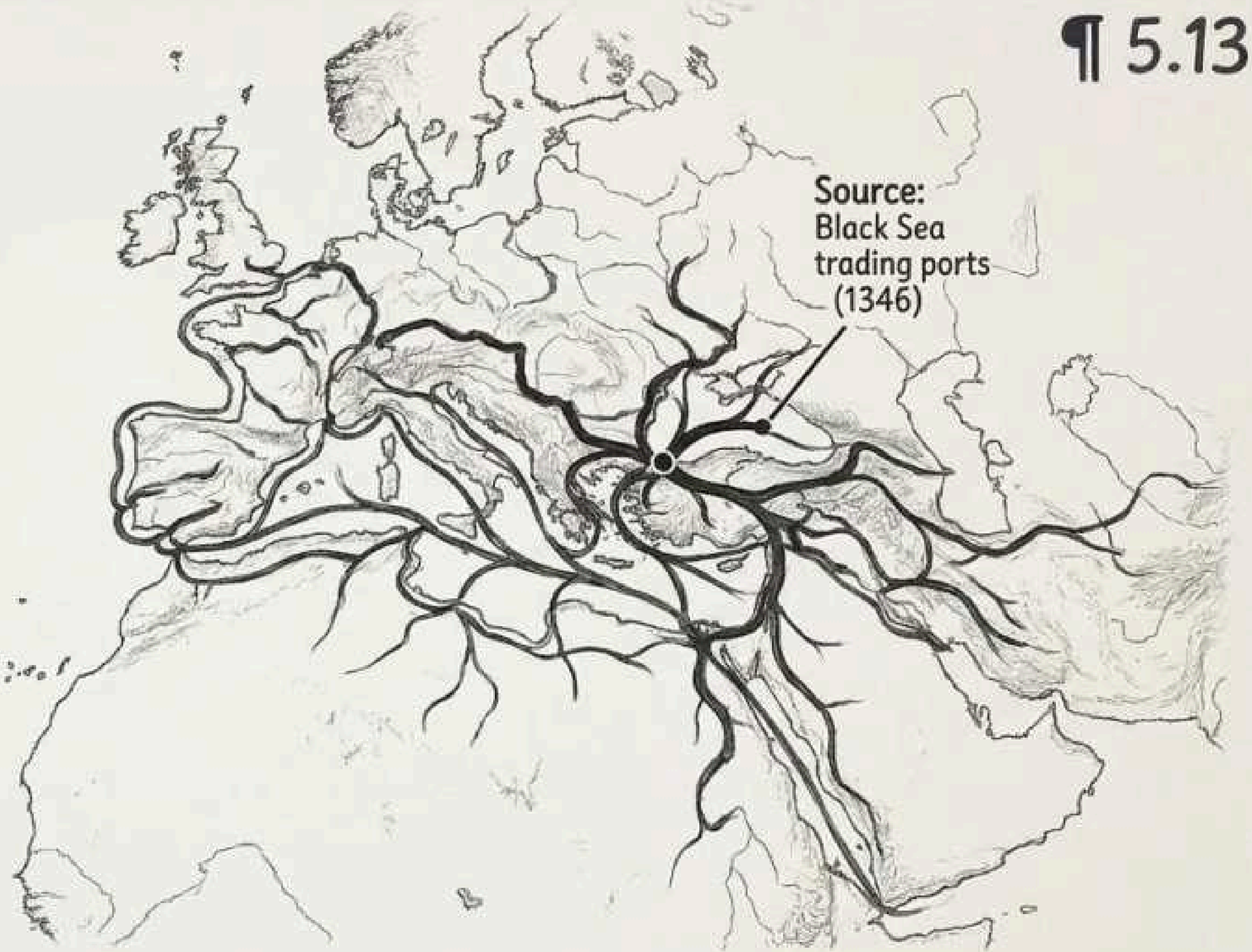
Fragmentation: Unity fails; empire divides into 4 khanates. Rulers assimilate to local cultures (e.g., Ilkhans in Persia become Muslim). Yuan driven out of China in 1368.



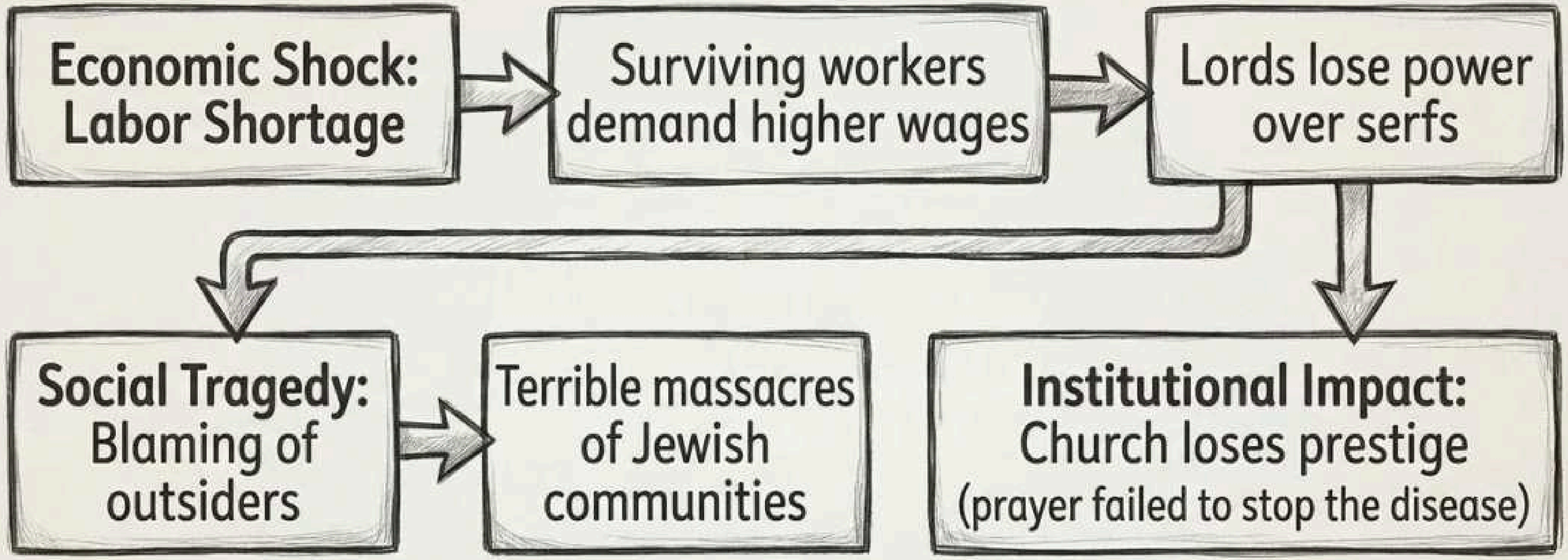
Conclusion: Historians disagree. Both views have valid evidence.



The Vector Chain: Bubonic plague (Bacteria ➡ Fleas ➡ Rats ➡ Trade Routes).



The Toll: Killed 33% to 50% of people in Europe. Total Eurasian toll is uncertain but massive.



Historical Query / Debate:
Did the plague cause these on later changes, or merely speed up changes already underway?

¶ 5.15

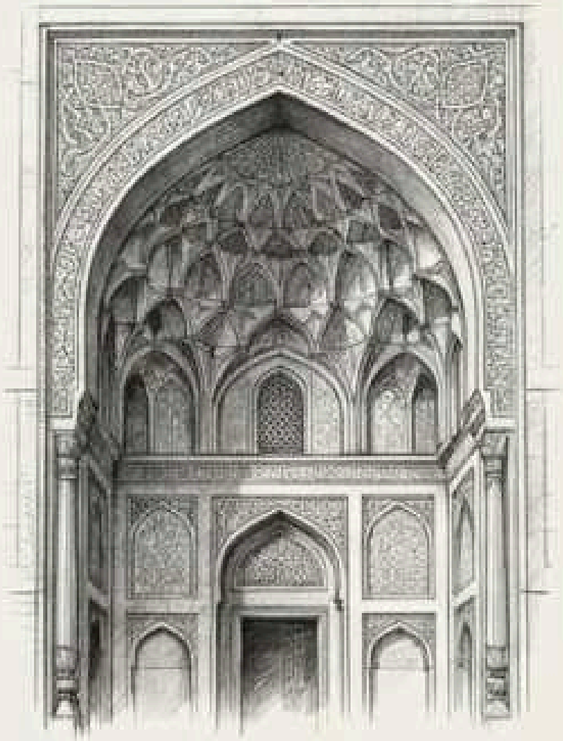
Thesis: The medieval period was a time of many centers of power, not one dominant region.



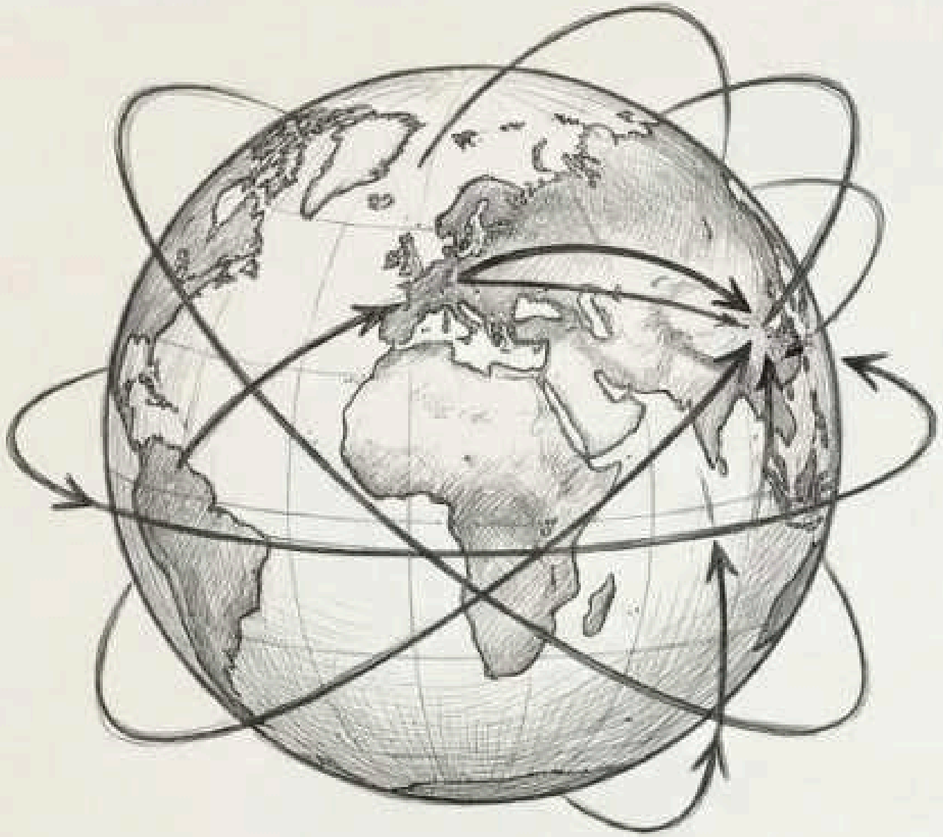
Japan: Civil war ends; warrior Minamoto no Yoritomo becomes shogun (1192). Samurai hold power for centuries.



Southeast Asia: Khmer kings build monumental Angkor Wat.



India: Muslim sultans rule from Delhi starting in 1206.



The Macro (Deeply Linked):
Chinese inventions reach Europe in a few generations; plagues cross Asia in a few years.



The Micro (Locally Lived):
People lived mainly in local worlds of the farm, village, and market.

Takeaway: Good history keeps both the local and the global in view simultaneously.

Taking Stock (~1400 CE)

1. Europe: Rebuilt itself under lords, bishops, and merchants.

2. Africa: Mali and Great Zimbabwe built vast wealth on gold and trade.

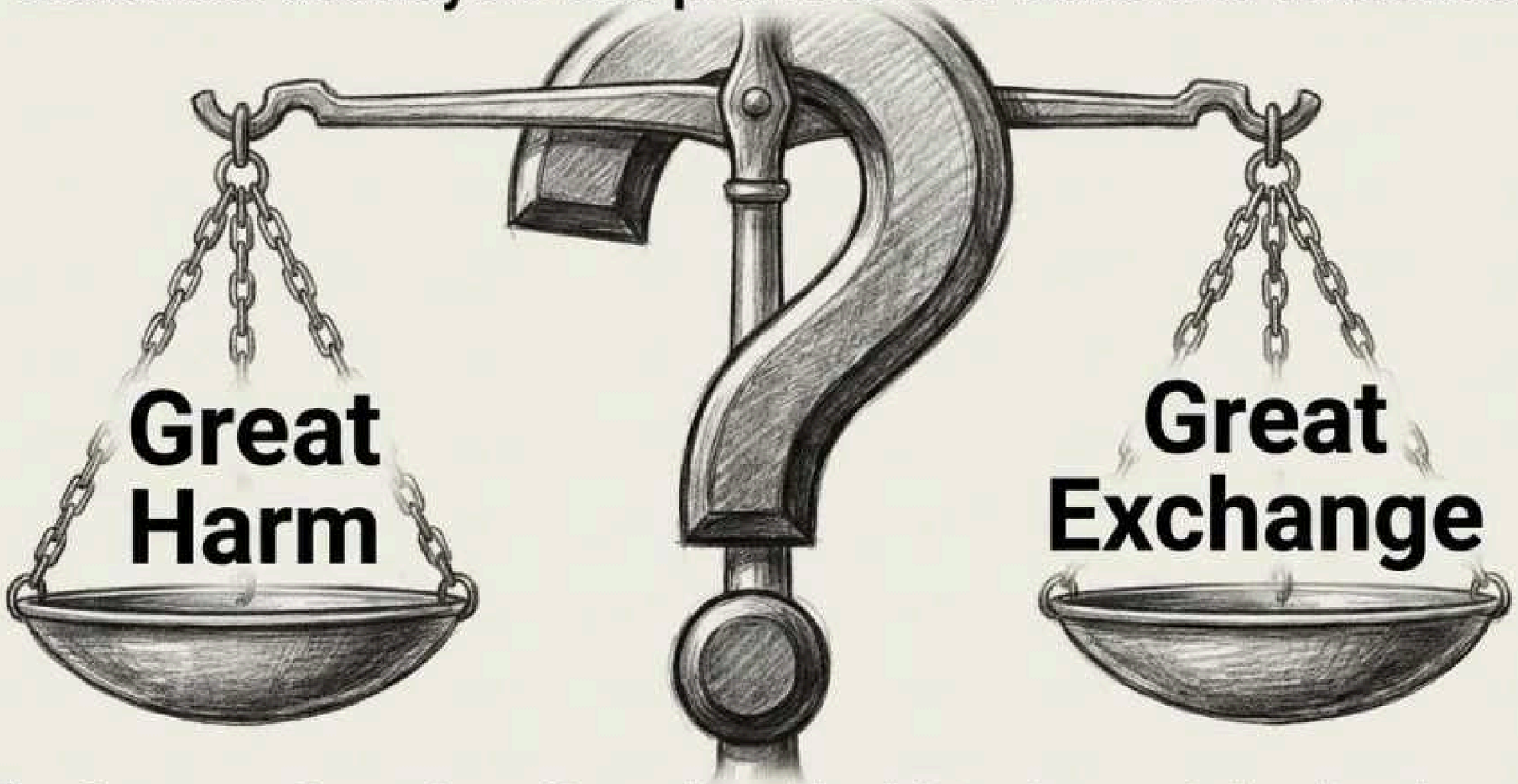
3. Mongols: United Eurasia by force, then linked it by trade.

4. Black Death: Demonstrated how deep connection can bring total catastrophe.

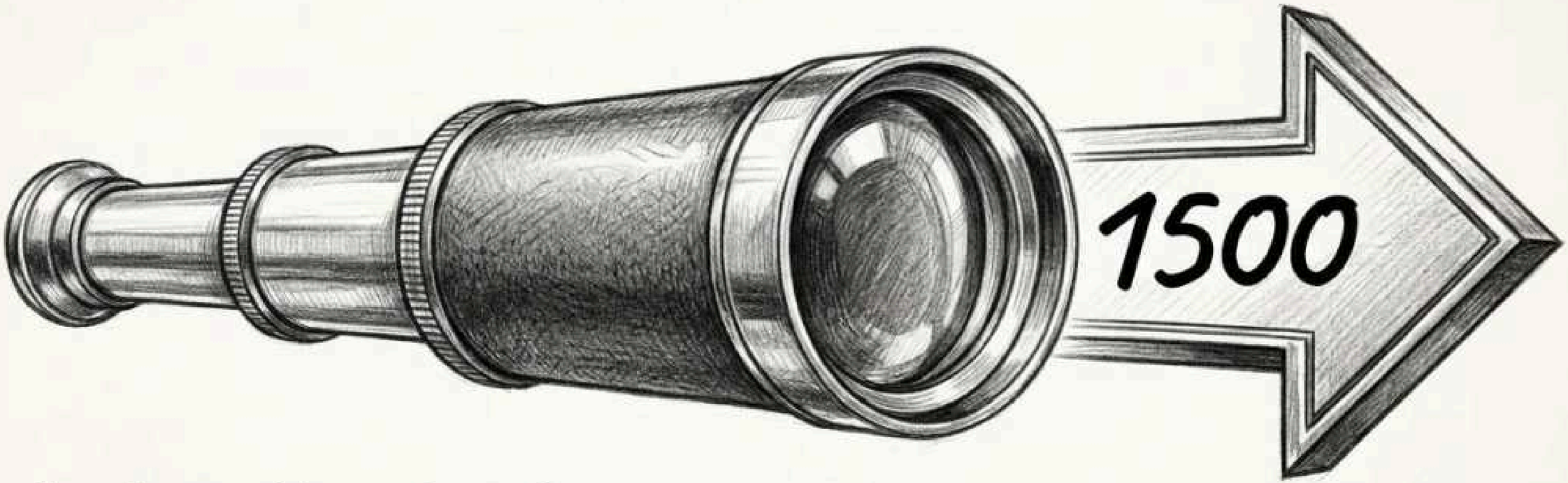
By 1400, the board is set for another reshuffling of global power.

¶ 5.18

The Paradox: The Mongols are remembered as both merciless destroyers and promoters of trade and tolerance.



The Lecture Question: How should a historian weigh a leader whose actions brought both great harm and great exchange?



Looking Ahead to Lecture 6:

- Surveying the state of the world in 1500.
- Answering the meta-question: How do historians think?