

## REVIEWS

**Jerry J. Bentley.** *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Conflicts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Pp. xi, 220. Cloth, \$35.00; paper, \$14.95.

In the last generation or so, any number of new approaches to the study of history—from Cliometrics to gender—have shown promise of new visions and new understanding. One of the richest of these new approaches is world history, dating in its modern incarnation to the 1960s. Today, the efforts of world historians are focused in the World History Association, with its newsletter and journal. Jerry Bentley, the author of *Old World Encounters*, is editor of that WHA journal, the *Journal of World History*. He is in the forefront of this new intellectual pursuit, in which a host of world historians are trying to put aside the distorting lens of traditional Eurocentrism (or even traditional Sinocentrism) and replace it with a truly global understanding.

In this monograph, Bentley looks at cross-cultural contacts and exchanges before Columbus. In actual practice, his study is of religious exchanges, with only passing attention going to technology, institutions, or art. Bentley further limits his study to the periods of time for which there are substantial written sources.

He focuses on large-scale religious conversions, which he classifies under three rubrics. First is conversion by voluntary association, that is, individuals choosing to change. Second is conversion brought about by political, social, or economic pressure. Third is conversion by assimilation, when a minority group slips into a majority's beliefs. No matter which form of conversion occurred, it was always accompanied by some degree of syncretism; no conversion took place without the convert retaining some elements of previous beliefs.

Bentley looks at four periods. First was the time of the ancient silk roads from 200 B.C.E. to 400 C.E. The decline of the Roman and Han Empires ended this period, and in about 600 the large imperial states of the Tang, Abbasid, and Carolingian Empires and the Indian Ocean's sea lanes tied the Eurasian landmass together once again. This second period blended into a new one after 1000, a period driven less by mercantile impulses than by the political and military expansion of the Mongols and Turks. The terrible plague of the Black Death disrupted that system, but by 1400 new technologies drove a reconstitution of the trade system.

In the context of these commercial and cultural contacts, Bentley looks at how the great world religions (and their heresies and offshoots) spread and gathered converts. He clearly recognizes, but may underestimate, the importance of the need for a common code of ethics and morality to carrying out long-distance trade. Bentley uses a wide range of sources, but he wears his learning easily, so that even beginning undergraduates can profit from this book.

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**J. Kelley Sowards, ed.** *Makers of World History.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. Volume I: Pp. xii, 302. Volume II: Pp. xii, 334. Each volume \$19.35.

Among Western Civ teachers, J. Kelley Sowards has been known for a long time as a provider of useful biographical supplements for basic textbooks. Now, as many of us adapt to the demands of *World Civ*, we have his *Makers of World History* to perform the same service. In both the Western and World courses, Sowards seems to assign a large role to "great men" and "great women" in the generation of historical forces. This runs against strong trends in basic