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PART I
INTRODUCTION

1

ANTHROPOLOGY,
THE MIDDLE EAST,
AND CENTRAL ASIA

We need to think beyond the limits of existing political and geographic frontiers to grasp the subtle links among economic and political currents, religious movements, and the movement of people and ideas. An older notion of geography as physical frontiers still provides a significant point of departure for understanding the societies and politics of the Middle East and Central Asia. However, traditional notions of frontier must be placed alongside the complex transnational commercial, economic, religious, and intellectual links that contribute to creating national, religious, ethnic, and state identities. The increased pace of labor migration and the growing ease of travel and communication have played an important part in eroding the significance of physical frontiers. In particular, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990–1991 rapidly led to the dissolution of boundaries between the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Middle East, boundaries that had been almost impermeable for much of the twentieth century.

**THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA:
SHIFTING FRONTIERS**

The terms "Middle East" and "Central Asia" appear clear when they are employed in general common-sense contexts. In contemporary usage the Middle East encompasses the region stretching from Rabat to Tehran, a distance of

roughly 3400 miles (equal to the distance from New York City to Fairbanks, Alaska). To give another indication of its vastness, the Middle East includes territory on three continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe (the European section of Turkey). When certain features of the linguistic, religious, political, and historical complexities of the region are emphasized, the term is often extended to include Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The boundaries of Central Asia, across which the caravans of the Great Silk Route brought luxury goods from China to Europe in the Middle Ages, are similarly indistinct. They have become more so since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the growing diversity of Central Asia's commercial and political links with the outside world. For purposes of this book, Central Asia includes the former Soviet states of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan (see Figure 1-1). Azerbaijan is not part of Central Asia, but because of its Muslim majority population and a partially shared administrative and political heritage, it is discussed in this book within the context of Central Asia.

If the limits of Central Asia appear indistinct today, they were more so before the expansion of the Russian Empire and the influx of Russian settlers in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Until then, the region was vaguely known as Turkestan or, as in a mid-nineteenth-century British map, "independent Tartary," a region of independent khanates, or principalities, stretching from the borders of present-day Iran in the south to northeast of the Caspian Sea.¹ Central Asian history has been neglected because the region exists in a "double periphery"—between the spheres of Inner Asian and Islamic civilizations, where Perso-Islamic and Turko-Mongolian traditions have converged since the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. Today scholars are rethinking the limits of the region, although, as Adeeb Khalid writes, no clear consensus has yet emerged.²

Although Central Asia and the Middle East lack clearly defined natural frontiers, the sense of frontiers is intimately linked to the dynamics of history and political context. Robert Canfield argues that the traditional sense of "area studies" inadvertently perpetuated a division of the world into spheres that made sense more for displaying artifacts in museums of an earlier era than for understanding changing political, social, and economic fields.³ Assessing

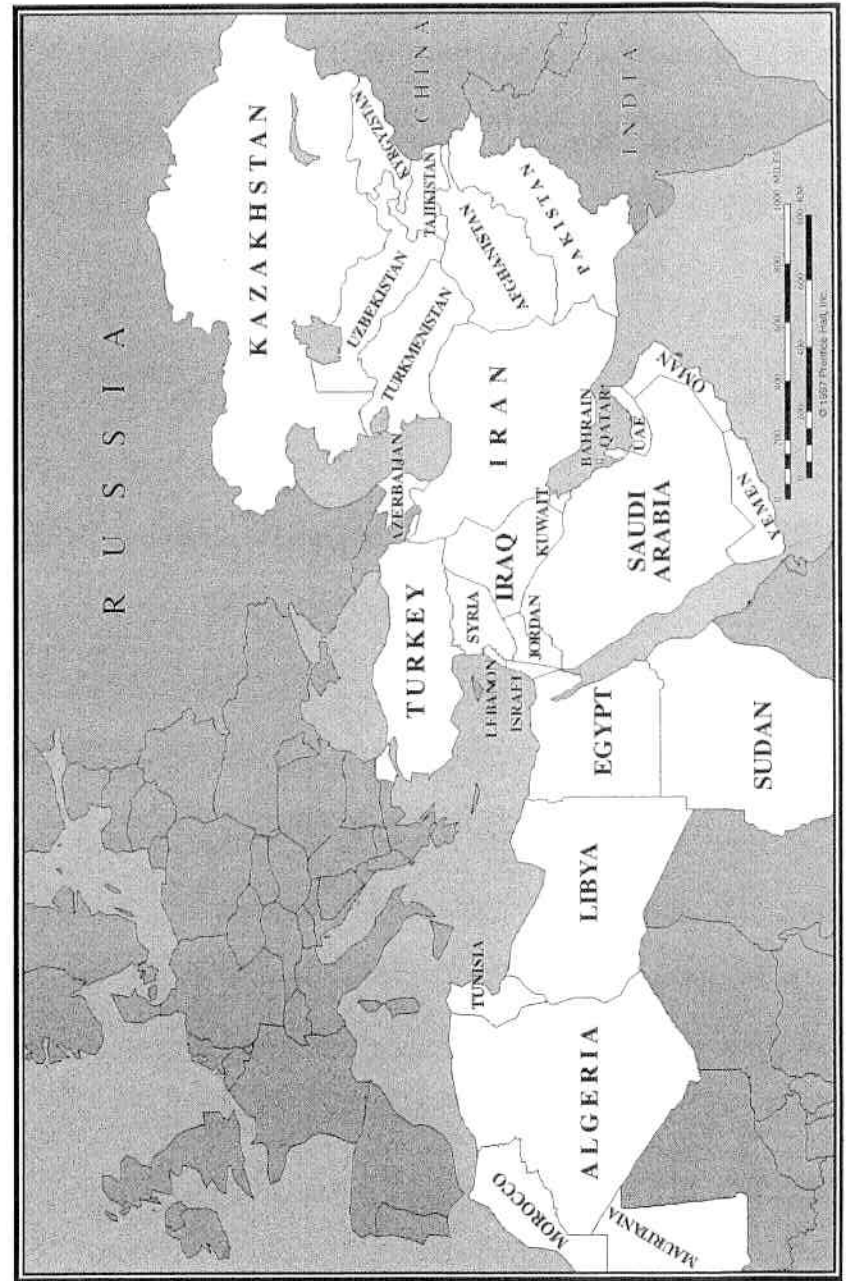


FIGURE 1-1. The Middle East and Central Asia: Political boundaries, 1990.

¹ Mark Katz, personal communication, July 15, 1996.

² Jo-An Gross, "Introduction: Approaches to the Problem of Identity Formation," in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-An Gross, Central Asia Book Series (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 1, 16-17. The phrase "double periphery" originates with the Russian historian Yuri Bregel. For a discussion of the definition of Central Asia and of Central Asian studies, see the thoughtful essay by Adeeb Khalid, "Your Asia or Mine? Central Asian Studies in Post-Soviet Times," *NewsNet* 39, no. 5 (November 1999), 1-3.

³ Robert L. Canfield, "Preface," in *Turco-Persia in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Canfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. xiii-xiv.

long-term historical developments in the Turkic- and Persian-speaking areas of the Middle East and Central Asia, he suggests that we replace the older term "culture area" with *ecumene* in order to emphasize the historically intertwined ebb and flow of political, economic, ethnic, and religious currents and practices that characterized Central Asia and the Iranian and Anatolian plateaus prior to the twentieth century and that characterize them again in the wake of recently unsealed and porous frontiers.

Azerbaijan, a country of 7.7 million people situated between Iran, Armenia, Turkey, the Caspian Sea, and Russia, provides an example of these fluctuating zones of influence. Geographically, oil-rich Azerbaijan is part of the Caucasus region, which includes Armenia, Georgia, and parts of Russia. Azeri is a Turkic language that significantly overlaps with Turkish. In terms of religion, native Azeris are overwhelmingly Muslim, unlike Christian Armenia and Georgia. Azerbaijanis share much in common with the peoples of northern Iran, a region where Azeri Turkish, not Persian, remains the first language of much of the population. Like several of its neighbors, including Turkey, Azerbaijan's political boundaries have been redrawn or significantly challenged several times since the late nineteenth century.⁴

Changes in script also suggest shifting political and social fields. In 1926, Azerbaijan converted from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, two years before the change was made official in Turkey; but in 1940 Stalin ordered Latin script abandoned in favor of Cyrillic. In November 1992, Azerbaijan officially decreed a return to the Latin script, a move implicitly facilitating its ties with Turkey, which also uses the Latin alphabet, and the West. Of the 20 telephones arrayed next to the desk of Azerbaijan's president, Ayaz Mutalibov, in September 1991, three were direct connections to the Turkish telephone network. Business school teachers were already commuting regularly from Istanbul to Baku, and in 1991, 600 Azeri students were studying business and management in Turkey.⁵ Azeris say that this latest alphabet shift restores links with their national past. In 1993, the other Central Asian republics decided officially to implement the transition from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, except for Persian-speaking Tajikistan, which opted instead for Arabic script.⁶ In all these cases, however, Russian and the Cyrillic alphabet continue to play a major role as the dominant language and script for the elite and the socially mobile.

The frontiers of post-Soviet Central Asia look fixed on the map but remain ambiguous in practice. Many observers write of "Central Asia and

⁴ See Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁵ Author's interviews, Baku, September 18–20, 1991.

⁶ Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 211–15.

Kazakhstan," considering Kazakhstan as separate from Central Asia. There are differences between Central Asia and Kazakhstan, notably in numbers of ethnic Russians present in the northern part of the country, but there are equally strong continuities with other Central Asian countries. Kazakhs compose less than a majority of Kazakhstan's population, even if they are its major ethnic group, composing 42 percent of the population. Russians compose 37 percent, and Slavs, including deported populations from earlier eras, make up much of the remaining 21 percent of the population of 17.5 million (1993 estimates). Much of the Slavic population, including Russians, are concentrated in Kazakhstan's mineral-rich northern regions (*oblasts*), giving these regions a different economic, linguistic, and political profile from the southern ones, where ethnic Kazakhs predominate in all but the large urban centers. Some of the northern *oblasts* have Russian names, although Kazakh has been designated the state language since 1989. In 1996, Kazakhstan announced plans to move its capital from Almaty, in the southeast, to the north in order to be closer to the state's center of population and symbolically to underscore the country's unity.⁷ When Kazakhstan adopted a new constitution in January 1993, it also changed the spelling of its capital city from *Alma-Ata* to *Almaty*, bringing it into conformity with "the rules of the Kazakh language."⁸

The flux in the names of cities, provinces, and countries applies to the names designating broader areas also; and these names are not politically neutral. The specialist's reluctance to speak of the "Middle East" or "Central Asia" without providing extensive glosses is due to the circumstances surrounding the terms' origins. The region's inhabitants did not coin the term "the Middle East." Like older, geographically restricted labels such as "the Near East" and "the Levant," it originated with nineteenth-century European strategists and is unabashedly Eurocentric. In the geopolitics of the British military, for example, the "Middle East" meant the command responsible for the region from the Nile to the Oxus rivers; the lands to the east of the Oxus belonged to the Indian command.⁹ In terms of civilizational boundaries, such a division made little sense because it cut the historically united (or at least interacting) Iranian plateau in two, but the term was not coined with scholars in mind.

The terms most commonly used to describe North Africa make sense against the backdrop of the pattern of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European colonial domination. Thus the term "North Africa" does not literally

⁷ Anatoly M. Khazanov, *After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 158; Philip S. Gillette, "Ethnic Balance and Imbalance in Kazakhstan's Regions," *Central Asian Monitor*, no. 3 (1993), 17–23.

⁸ Gillette, "Ethnic Balance," p. 18.

⁹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 60–61.

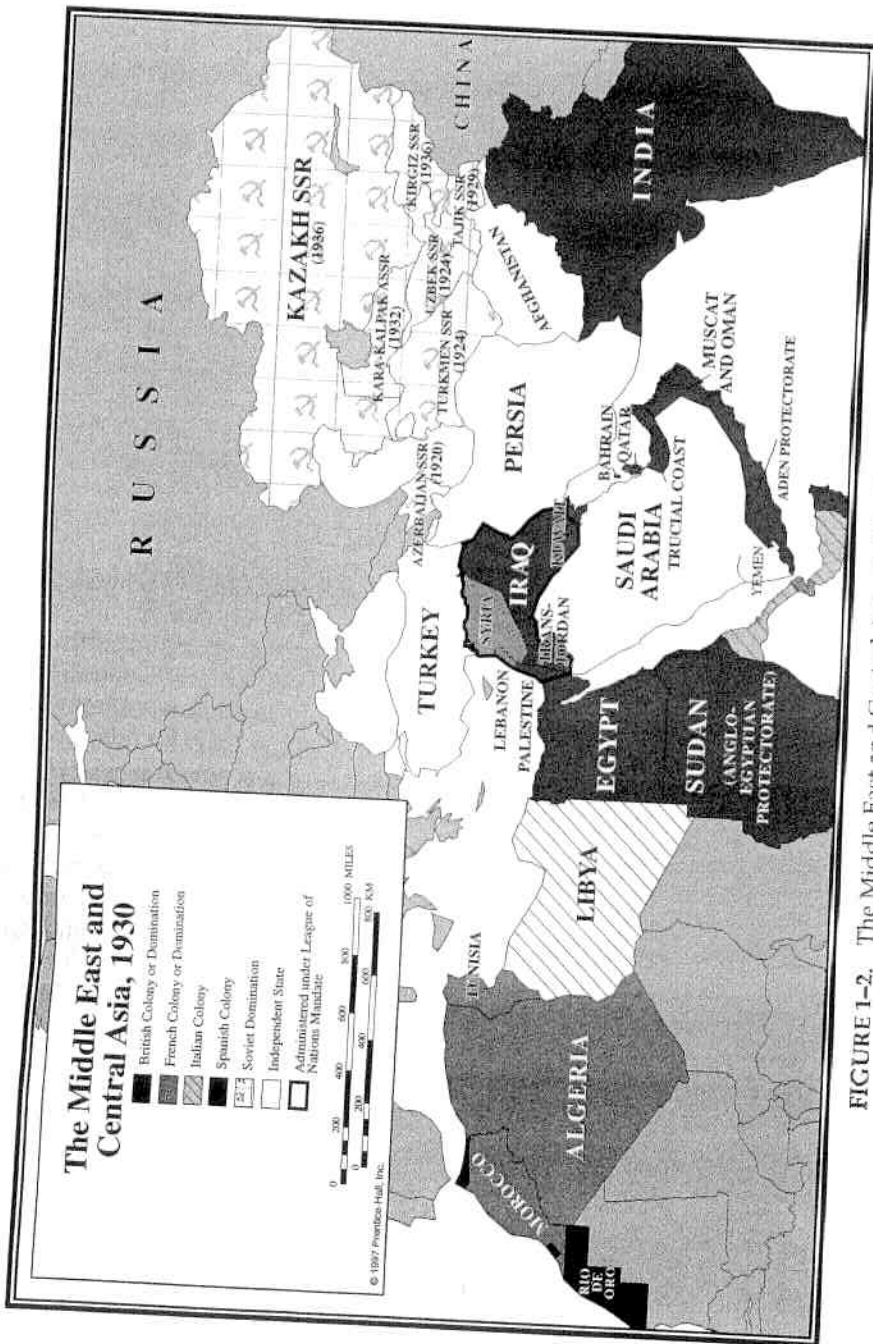


FIGURE 1-2. The Middle East and Central Asia: Political boundaries, 1930.

mean the entire northern part of that continent, but Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. For Arabic-speakers, this region, excluding Egypt, is generally known as the “Maghrib” (“the West”), or, more poetically, “the land where the sun sets.” This term reflects the geopolitics of an earlier era, when the first waves of Muslim invaders came from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh and eighth centuries. “Maghrib” is popularly used in French as well, largely because the region—less Libya (conquered by Italy), the Spanish Sahara, and a narrow mountainous zone in northern Morocco (ceded by the French to Spain in 1912)—was under French domination until the mid-twentieth century (see Figure 1-2). Even in this more compact region of French domination, the imposition of colonial boundaries created distinctions that remain significant today. Arab geographers considered the country now known as the Islamic Republic of Mauritania as part of the Maghrib. However, Mauritania was attached to French West Africa and administered from Dakar during the era of colonial rule. As a result, it is often not considered part of the Middle East, despite the fact that the majority of its population is Muslim and Arabic-speaking and the country is a member of the Arab League and the Maghrib Arab Union. The Islamic Republic of the Sudan has a large non-Muslim, non-Arabic-speaking minority. Largely due to the accident of colonial rule, the Sudan is considered part of the Middle East. It fell under Egyptian rule in 1830 and from 1899 until 1955 was governed by what was formally an Anglo-Egyptian condominium.

The arbitrariness of colonial boundaries becomes especially apparent in Central Asia under Soviet rule. Figure 1-2 offers a snapshot of Middle Eastern and Central Asian frontiers as they appeared in 1930. Under Soviet rule, the political boundaries throughout the region were frequently altered, beginning with Russia’s 1917 revolution and extending until the late 1930s. In the years immediately after the revolution, boundaries were often rearranged to reduce or remove the threat of secession. Between 1924 and 1936, the region was divided into arbitrarily designated autonomous republics in which a majority of the population shared the same nationality, but which also contained enclaves of peoples of other ethnic groups (*ethnies*) gathered into “homelands.” As head of the People’s Commissariat for Nationality Affairs (Russian, *Narkomnats*) after 1917, Joseph Stalin (1879–1953) played a major role in elaborating Soviet nationality policy.¹⁰ Beginning in the 1920s, censuses were conducted in which people often were forced to choose a nationality, and these choices, once made, had significant political consequences. Thus an inhabitant of present-day Tajikistan might not have had a distinct consciousness at the time of the 1924 union-wide census of being an Uzbek or a Tajik but was forced to choose one category or the other.¹¹

¹⁰ For an assessment of these policies, see Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 102–38.

¹¹ See the newspaper drawings reproduced in Edward Allworth, *The Uzbeks* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), pp. 202–203.

In sum, the terms "Middle East" and "Central Asia" remain useful, but should not be taken to indicate a political, economic, or religious **homogeneity**. The shifting cultural and historical realities must be taken into account in any meaningful study of these regions. In any case, the term "Middle East" is now employed in a fairly neutral, descriptive sense by Middle Easterners themselves and is used in the same way in this book. In Arabic, it is also the title of a London-based daily newspaper, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*. We employ Central Asia in a similar manner.

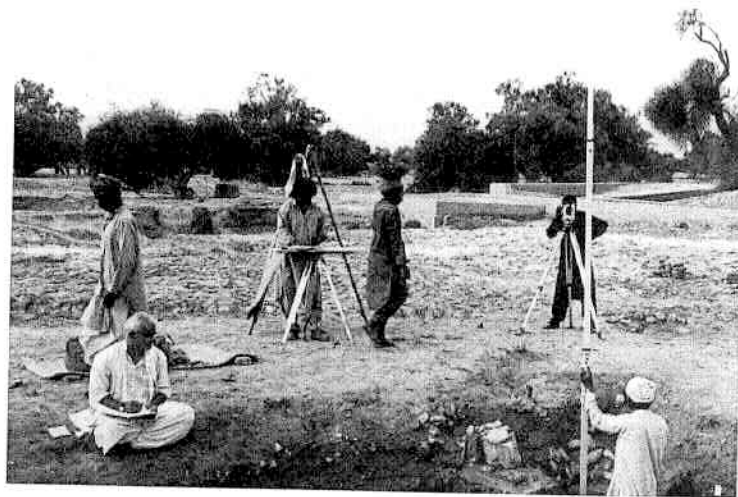
FIRST APPROXIMATIONS

Geography

As a whole, the Middle East is semiarid (although there are important local variations); since antiquity it has been a region of agriculture (since at least 8000 B.C.) and empire; and it lacks sharply defined natural boundaries. Although the region is partially cut off from sub-Saharan Africa and the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent by mountains and deserts, its northern boundaries with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan are primarily political, and with the end of the Soviet era, all these countries have become increasingly accessible from the "Middle Eastern" south. The Middle East has always been accessible to conquest by land and sea, and it has long served as a crossroads of long-distance trade. These characteristics do not serve to distinguish the Middle East from other major sociocultural areas, but they do constitute relevant factors for historical developments and the kinds of lives lived in the region.

Similarly, Central Asia has few natural frontiers, as attested by the Mongol invasions of Central Asia, parts of Russia and eastern Prussia, Persia, and Mesopotamia in the thirteenth century. It is a region of arid and semiarid grasslands and mountains interspersed with fertile valleys. The northernmost republic, Kazakhstan, is a vast steppe region with a higher (although irregular) rainfall than in the regions to the south. Once the almost exclusive domain of steppe nomads, since the 1930s it has been given over to wheat cultivation, just as Soviet-era central planners converted areas of Uzbekistan grasslands into irrigated cotton fields.

As Figure 1-3 indicates, few places in the Middle East or Central Asia receive the 40 to 50 inches of rainfall that is characteristic of the eastern United States and of the richer agricultural regions of Europe. Some coastal and mountain areas receive up to 20 inches annually, but many other regions receive as little as 4 to 8 inches annually (Saudi Arabia) or less than 1 inch a year (southern Egypt). Nonirrigated farming is possible only in relatively narrow belts of Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Jordan, the Maghrib, and Uzbekistan's Farghāna Valley. Even in these cases, the amount of rain varies substantially from year to year. The timing of rain is also erratic, making what rain there is



Excavations of new areas at Harappa, an important archaeological site in Pakistan's Sindh province, reveal new information about the vast trading networks established during the heyday of the Indus Valley cities (2600–1900 B.C., especially 2450–2200 B.C.). These trading networks cross the frontiers between major world regions as they are generally understood today. In the photograph above, J. Mark Kenoyer (seated left, University of Wisconsin, Madison), codirector of the Harappa Archaeological Research Project with Harvard University's Richard H. Meadow, is excavating an important craft production area at the site. Assisted by Pakistani student archaeologists and local workers, he is mapping the newly exposed structures. The site area (Mound ET) is located just inside a major gateway and appears to have been a craft quarter or bazaar area. Traded materials included lapis lazuli and pottery from the highlands of Baluchistan and Central Asia; shells from Oman, Gujarat, and Pakistan's Makran coast; and copper from Rajasthan, Baluchistan, and Oman. Each new season of excavation raises questions and significantly changes our understanding of the social and economic dynamics of the Indus Valley and its relation to other major regions. [Photograph by William Miller.]

useless for farming. Where there is heavy rainfall, as in the Rif mountains of northern Morocco, the soils are often too poor to permit regular, adequate agricultural yields.

Nonetheless, agriculture is important throughout both the Middle East and Central Asia. According to 1970 figures, over 95 percent of the Middle

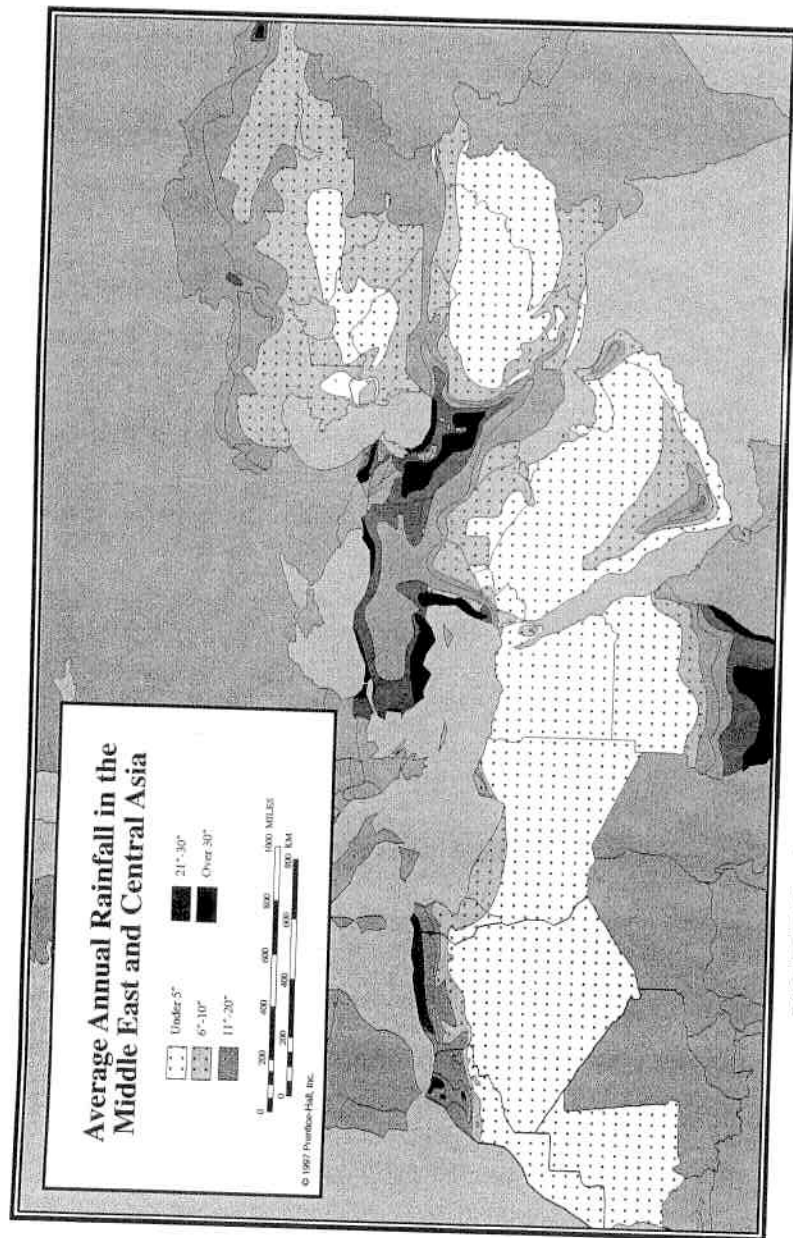


FIGURE 1-3. Average annual rainfall in the Middle East and Central Asia.

East's rural population (reliable figures are unavailable for Central Asia) is sedentary and derives its livelihood from agriculture, although only 14 percent of the total land surface is arable.¹² Thus the popular image of Central Asia as a region of steppe nomads, or of the Middle East as a land of nomads traveling between desert oases, is misleading. To a large extent, however, agriculture is dependent on irrigation. Many of the centers of population cluster around sources of water for agriculture. In Egypt, for example, cultivation is confined to a few miles on either side of the Nile River. The Nile Delta and the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq contain intricate webs of irrigation channels that support dense populations.

Elsewhere in the Middle East there are other sorts of irrigation systems, both traditional and modern, adapted to local circumstances. Wells are often a source of water, although in Iran and in regions of Morocco such as Marrakesh, there are elaborate underground canals (called *ghattāra* in Morocco, *qanāt* in Iran, and *aflāj* in Oman) that carry water from underground streams in nearby mountain regions to the rich oases of the plains. Modern technology has greatly expanded the land that has been brought under cultivation, but where modern wells and pumps are introduced, they often remove water from fossil aquifers faster than it can be replaced and threaten to exhaust a nonrenewable resource. This calamity has happened in parts of Yemen; and the mismanagement of water resources in Central Asia—the Aral Sea is an outstanding example—poses a similar threat.

Because it is semiarid, large parts of the Middle East traditionally have been given over to a mode of livelihood that combines the extensive cultivation of crops such as wheat and barley with sheep and goat herding. Herds are usually moved in fixed patterns between adjacent ecological zones in the course of a year and graze on the stubble of cultivated fields after harvest. Such movement is called *transhumant pastoralism* or *seminomadism*, and it differs from the movement of nomadic groups who follow their herds (pastoral nomadism). Seminomadic pastoralists and pastoral nomads form a significant but declining minority in such countries as Saudi Arabia (probably less than 3 percent), Iran (4 percent), and Afghanistan (no more than 10 percent). They comprise less than 2 percent of the population in the countries of North Africa, with the exception of Libya and Mauritania. Pastoral nomadism as the sole or predominant activity of certain groups, to the full exclusion of cultivation, is today relatively rare.¹³ Horse-riding pastoralists once dominated both the steppes and the mountain pastures (with mixed herds of sheep, goats, horses,

¹² Peter Beaumont, Gerald H. Blake, and J. Malcolm Wagstaff, *The Middle East: A Geographical Study* (New York: Wiley, 1976), pp. 160, 184–85. The limits of the Middle East, as defined by Beaumont, Blake, and Wagstaff, exclude all of the Maghrib except Libya, so these statistics should be regarded as approximate. For a geographic study that covers the entire Middle East as it is defined in this book, see Alasdair Drysdale and Gerald H. Blake, *The Middle East and North Africa: A Political Geography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹³ These figures are derived from Donald Powell Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads* (Chicago: Aldine, 1975), p. 143; and Beaumont, Blake, and Wagstaff, *The Middle East*, p. 185.

cattle, and camels) in Central Asia. Russian colonization beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and Stalin's forced collectivization of the 1930s had devastating effects on both livestock and humans, although there are signs that post-Soviet officials in the national governments of Central Asia are taking a renewed interest in pastoral production.¹⁴

The significance of transhumant pastoralists and nomads has often been exaggerated as a factor in Middle Eastern history, although the great Mongol invasions of Central Asia and parts of Europe and the Middle East by Chingiz (Genghis) Khān (1155–ca. 1227) and his successors left a lasting impact on world history, including the sack of Baghdad and the destruction of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate in 1258. Before the advent of modern technology, nomadic pastoral groups traditionally constituted a political and military threat to effective central government in many regions, including Morocco and Iran. Until 1922–1923, Iranian politics were constrained to some extent by tribally organized societies, which included nomadic and settled groups. These limited central government control. The same applies to Morocco. French and Spanish colonial rule began in Morocco in 1912, but it was not until the early 1930s that tribal resistance was overcome in all parts of the country.

Most Middle Eastern countries also possess mountainous regions—Kuwait and some of the Gulf states are exceptions—and these regions have served as zones of refuge from central government control. Thus the Kurds of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey and the Berber-speaking tribal groups in Algeria's Kabylia Mountains and Morocco's Rif and Atlas mountain chains managed to remain relatively autonomous until the recent past.

The interrelations among nomads, farmers, and city dwellers in the Middle East and Central Asia are important to understanding the region. The geographically limited area of the agricultural hinterlands of most cities and their vulnerability to adjacent pastoralists differentiate much of Middle Eastern and Central Asian history from that of Europe. This competition between city-based state apparatuses and outlying pastoralists, who could be raiders or "transportation specialists," over the farmlands between them continued until the 1940s.

The Middle East may have been a region of irrigation, agriculture, and pastoralism, but for many of the countries, significant mineral wealth, especially in oil, has in recent times created the potential for significant economic growth. Revenues from such resources dramatically increased in the 1960s and 1970s and have made possible substantial alterations in the social and material life of some of the region's inhabitants; but prices have also dropped since then, and they continue to fluctuate significantly. Likewise, the discovery of new oil resources in Kazakhstan and the introduction of modern technology to renew the oil fields of Azerbaijan have the potential for significantly improving those countries' economic outlook.

The Middle East is also a region of intense urban and commercial life, with ancient cities such as Damascus, Cairo, and Istanbul, as well as some of more recent origin such as Riyadh and Casablanca. Over 67 percent of the region's inhabitants were urban dwellers in 1990, as opposed to roughly 10 percent in 1900, and the proportion of urban dwellers to the overall population continues to rise.¹⁵ Of course, the transformations occurring in these cities are not unique to the Middle East. Central Asia shows similar patterns of urban growth, and the same rapid rate of urbanization is occurring throughout the Third World. In the chapters of this book concerned with cities, these general trends are considered. Equal emphasis is placed on the extent to which certain features of urban life continue to make these cities distinctly Turkish, Egyptian, Muslim, or Middle Eastern and how these culturally unique attributes influence and are affected by more general processes such as population growth and world economic currents.

Religion

In historical terms, the area designated by the broader, contemporary usage of the term "Middle East" coincides roughly with the first wave of Arab invasions and with the three largest Muslim empires at their greatest extent—the Umayyad (661–750), the early 'Abbāsīd (750–ca. 800), and the Ottoman (from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries). Even if not always politically unified, the region shows significant social and cultural continuities. The first adherents of Islam, and its initial carriers, were from the Arabian peninsula, but thinking of the Arabian peninsula or even the wider Arab world as a "heartland" of Islam can lead to a distorted view of Islamic civilization. The epicenter of the total world Muslim population lies between Iran and Pakistan, on the eastern edge of the area with which this book is concerned. Muslims today are situated in a wide band that ranges from Indonesia and the Philippines through the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey to the Arabic-speaking regions of the Middle East and Black Africa. Nearly half of the world's one billion Muslims live in Southeast Asia. The political significance of Muslims in South and Southeast Asia, like that of Muslims in Europe and North America, continues to grow rapidly.

Population figures for Muslims elsewhere in the world are also substantial. By current estimates, Indonesia alone contains almost as many Muslims (140 million) as the Arab Middle East (162 million), and the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent (272 million) outnumber those of the Arab states, Iran, and Turkey combined (254 million). The 1989 census of the former Soviet Union—its last—which of course included the now-independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, indicated a Muslim population of 55 million, which gave

¹⁴ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Nomadic Alternative* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), pp. 136–44, 176.

¹⁵ Alan Duben, *The Middle Eastern City: An Urban Management Perspective* (Istanbul: International Union of Local Authorities, 1992), p. 38; and Beaumont, Blake, and Wagstaff, *The Middle East*, p. 185.

The tentative nature of demographic and population estimates and their political implications should always be kept in mind. To cite two examples, population estimates for Afghanistan in 1968 ranged from 7 to 17 million. No official knew the real figures, but they all recognized that higher figures yielded the prospect of more international aid. The only official census in Afghanistan—one not conducted by internationally recognized standards—dates from 1979. A census in Saudi Arabia in 1962–1963, the results of which were never officially recognized, revealed that the population was only 3.9 million as contrasted to earlier estimates of 7 million. The 1972 estimate was 8 million. (See Robert J. Lapham, "Population Policies in the Middle East and North Africa," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 11, no. 2 [May 1977], 16.) In 1992, Saudi Arabia announced that it had completed a new census, indicating a population of 16.9 million, of which Saudis made up 12.3 million and foreigners 4.6 million, and a growth rate of between 3.5 and 3.8 percent, one of the highest in the world ("Saudis' Census Counts 16.9 Million People," *New York Times*, December 16, 1992, p. A8). The estimated population for 2000 is 22 million. A convenient source for current population figures for the Middle East and Central Asia as regions, and for specific countries, is the United States Census Bureau's International Data Base (IDB) <www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew.html>. This regularly updated website provides basic demographic indicators, such as birth rates, infant mortality rates, life expectancy, rate of population growth, literacy, urban/rural population figures, and fertility rates (per woman), from 1950 to 2050 when data are available. As convenient as this website is, its figures sometimes lag behind information directly available from the national statistical offices. For example, the Sultanate of Oman conducted its first census in November 1993 and published the detailed results in Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Development, Information and Documentation Center, *Socio-Economic Atlas* (Muscat: Ministry of Development, 1996), together with annual updates of information on schools, educational enrollment, health, and economic data. None of the demographic information, however, appears in the IDB tables. For one of the best examples of a published, country-specific demographic study, see Onn Winckler, *Demographic Developments and Population Policies in Ba'athist Syria* (Brighton, UK and Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 1999). Winckler has also published on Jordan and other Arab states.

the former Soviet Union the fifth-largest Muslim population of any country in the world.¹⁶ As of 1995, there were 5 million Muslims in France, making up some 5 percent of the population, and significant Muslim populations in Germany (2 million), Great Britain (1 million), Belgium, and the Netherlands. There were over 4 million Muslims in the United States in 1986, and 6 million

¹⁶ Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, "Growth and Diversity of the Population of the Soviet Union," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, no. 510 (July 1990), 155–77.

in 2000, taking into account immigration, birth rates, and conversion. Muslims will soon constitute the second-largest religious group in the United States after Christianity, and by 2010 will surpass the number of Jews in the United States. Muslim prayer leaders, together with their Christian and Jewish counterparts, now open sessions of Congress and serve as chaplains in the U.S. armed forces.¹⁷

Most people in the Middle East are Muslim, but this has not always provided a basis for common sentiment and identity. Currently an irredentism based on common religion is on the upsurge in the Middle East, as elsewhere in the world, but this was not always the case. From the 1950s to the 1970s, an irredentism based on common Arab identity swept the Arab world. Millions of Arabs rejoiced at the creation of the United Arab Republic, joining Egypt and Syria (February 1958)—which was soon complemented by a loose federation with Yemen (March 1958), called the United Arab States—as a first step toward Arab unity. Yet the federation with Yemen was never really implemented. No other states joined, and Syria seceded from the United Arab Republic in 1961, although Egypt retained the official title for many years. Although the idea of Arab unity remains a hope for many Arabs, later efforts at political union, such as that between Libya and Tunisia, have been equally short-lived.

Similarly, for over half a century the elite of Turkey stressed their ties with Europe more than those with their Muslim neighbors. In the last years of the Ottoman Empire, European statesmen referred to it as the "sick man of Europe," implicitly accepting the Ottoman elite's claim to a European identity. Egyptian elites prior to the 1950s, and again by the 1990s in certain contexts, stressed their country's Mediterranean identity rather than its Arab or Middle Eastern identity. The same is true for the countries of North Africa. Notwithstanding questions of modern nationalist feeling, historians such as Fernand Braudel have persuasively argued the case for considering the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean as a single society for extended historical periods.¹⁸ All Central Asian countries except Kazakhstan have overwhelmingly Muslim populations, but there are few signs that this shared identity is emerging as a significant political factor. At the same time, the seven decades of Communist rule failed to suppress the region's basic sense of "being Muslim."

Islam is the dominant religion of the Middle East. The state of Israel, where Jews constitute a majority of the population, is an obvious exception, but even in those countries where the majority of the population is Muslim, there are often significant Christian and Jewish minorities. In the Middle East as a whole, Muslims constitute 82 percent of the population, Christians 9 percent, Jews 7 percent, and other religions (primarily those of noncitizen workers

¹⁷ See Carla Power, "The New Islam," *Newsweek*, March 16, 1998, p. 34, and <<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/islam/fact2.htm>>. For Europe, see Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Europe's Muslim Population: Frustrated, Poor and Divided," *New York Times*, May 5, 1995, pp. A1, A12.

¹⁸ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1975 [French orig., 1949]).

in the Arabian peninsula states) 2 percent.¹⁹ Roughly 8 percent of Egypt's population is Christian (mostly Coptic), as are 20 percent of Syria's and Iraq's and perhaps 40 percent of Lebanon's. Exact statistics on the size of these minorities are hard to obtain, especially in the case of Lebanon, where no census has been conducted since 1932, in an effort (which largely succeeded until 1975) to preserve a delicate political balance between various ethnic and religious groups—Maronite Christian, Armenian Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Sunni Muslim, Shi'i Muslim, Palestinian Christians and Muslims, Druze, and other smaller groups. Elsewhere in the Middle East, there have been thriving Greek and Armenian Christian communities, especially in Egypt and Turkey, although since the beginning of this century their numbers have diminished considerably. The distribution of Jewish and Christian populations in the Middle East at the turn of the twentieth century was very different from the distribution of those populations today.²⁰

Similarly, in Central Asia, Russian colonization and Soviet policies brought large numbers of Slavs to the region. In capital cities such as Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Almatay (Kazakhstan), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), and Dushanbe (Tajikistan), up to one-third of the population is Russian, although the non-indigenous population has dropped steadily since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In Kyrgyzstan, only 20 percent of the industrial workers are Kyrgyz (even less in management and engineering), and in Kazakhstan, only 18 percent of the industrial workers are Kazakh.²¹ As was the case in the Middle East at the end of the colonial era, these numbers are rapidly changing as ethnic Russians leave the region. The shifting ethnic balance in Central Asia and elsewhere suggests how complex ethnic and religious identities, fears, and opportunities are sustained and articulated in changing economic and political contexts.

Except Israel (where Jews make up roughly 80 percent of the population), most of the countries of the Middle East have always had significant Jewish minorities. Jewish communities have also played a major role in the urban life of Central Asia. Jewish communities contracted in size after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the collapse of the colonial regimes of North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, and, in the east, the Iraqi revolution of 1958. Sizable Jewish minorities remain, however, in Iran, Turkey, Tunisia, and Morocco, although today one is more likely to hear Central Asian Jewish music in Queens, New York, than in Bukhāra or Samarkānd. Another significant minority in many countries of North Africa was composed of colonial settlers, who were predominantly, although not exclusively, French, Spanish, and Italian in origin and Christian in religion.

¹⁹ Estimates taken from *The Atlas of Mankind*, ed. I. M. Lewis, Christophe von Fürer-Haimendorf, and Fred Eggan (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1982), p. 106.

²⁰ See Youssef Courbege and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995 [French orig. 1991]).

²¹ Khazanov, *After the USSR*, p. 117.

Languages

Arabic is principally identified with Islam and the Middle East, yet this assumption engenders serious distortions, one of which is to diminish the role attributed to Persian culture in Islamic civilization. Although Arabic today is the principal language of the largest part of the Middle East, this was not always the case. For a considerable period after the Islamic conquests of the seventh century, Arabic had not become the principal language of either commoners or the indigenous elite of conquered regions such as Persia and North Africa. Likewise, at the peak of the Ottoman Empire's strength, from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, Ottoman Turkish tended to be the principal lingua franca of the elite in much of the region. Persian was also commonly employed in a similar role in regions beyond where it is spoken today.

The major language groups of the Middle East and Central Asia are indicated in Figure 1-4; note, though, that in many areas a number of languages and dialects of more limited scope also exist. In a small town of 12,000 inhabitants in northwestern Turkey—Susurluk—virtually the entire population spoke mutually intelligible dialects of Turkish in the late 1960s, but the older generation continued to speak Circassian and Georgian as well.²² Kurdish is widely spoken elsewhere in Turkey, which also has an Arabic-speaking minority. In northern Iraq, there is a bewildering array of ethnolinguistic communities—Kurdish-speaking Gypsies, Kurds, Arabic-speaking pastoralists, and a range of groups with finely distinguished religious, ethnic, and linguistic identities. Similarly, in many border areas of the Middle East, such as that between Iraq and Iran, most of the population is bilingual (Arabic and Persian) in southerly portions of that particular border or trilingual (Arabic, Persian, and Kurdish) along its northernmost sections.

There are large Berber-speaking populations in North Africa. Although most are becoming increasingly fluent in Arabic as well, there has been a resurgence of Berber cultural identity in Morocco and Algeria since the late 1980s, so the region's various Berber languages are not disappearing. In regions such as Egyptian and Sudanese Nubia, most of the male population is bilingual in Arabic and a Nubian dialect, although the advent of mass education in Egypt and the Sudan is increasingly limiting the use of the Nubian dialects to domestic contexts.²³

European languages, especially those of the former colonial powers, continue to be important in large parts of the Middle East. Similarly, Russian remains the common language of the educated elite of Central Asia, where the

²² Paul Magnarella, *Tradition and Change in a Turkish Town* (New York: Halsted Press, 1974), p. 33. For a general introduction to Middle Eastern languages, see Gernot L. Windfuhr, "Linguistics," in *The Study of the Middle East*, ed. Leonard Binder (New York: Wiley, 1976), pp. 347-97.

²³ Robert A. Fernea, "Ethnographic Essay," in *Nubians in Egypt: Peaceful People*, ed. Robert A. Fernea and Georg Gerster (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1973), pp. 15, 45-46.

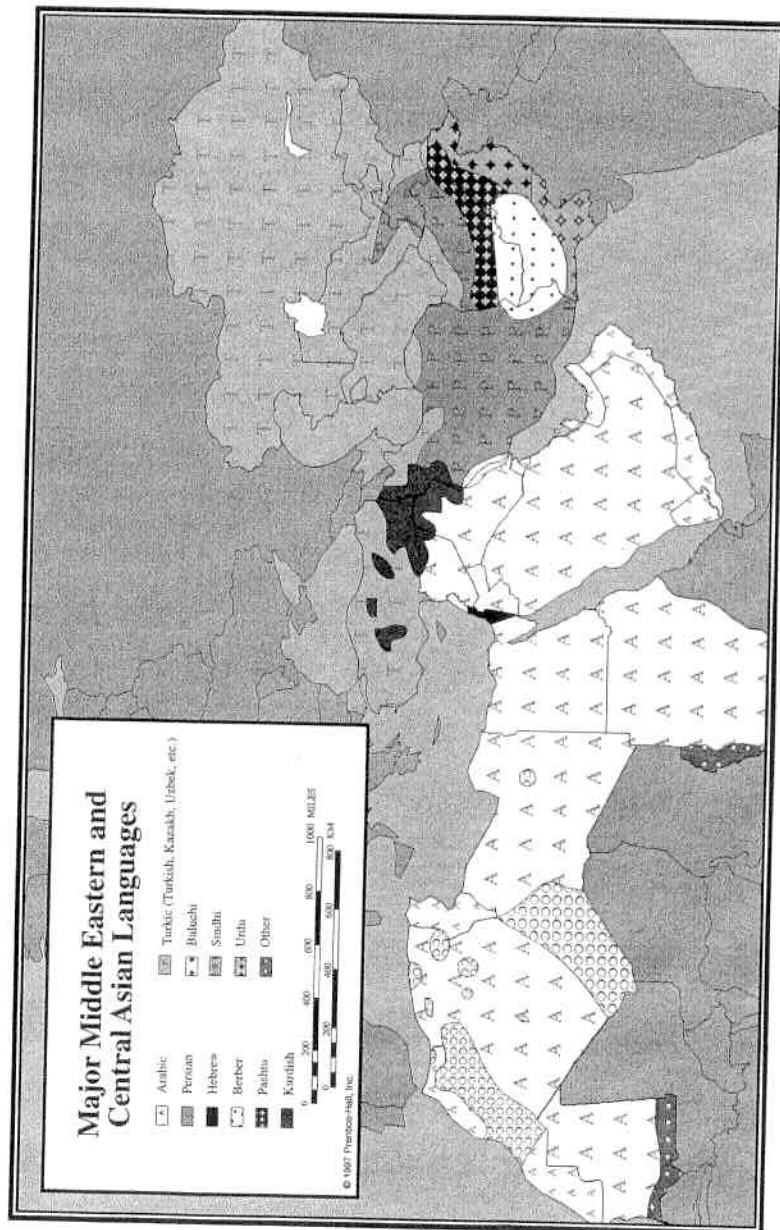


FIGURE 1-4. Major Middle Eastern and Central Asian languages.

laws regarding the introduction of national languages to replace Russian remain more symbolic than actual.²⁴ Arabic is the national language in all the countries of France's former North African colonies, but the urban educated population is usually bilingual in French and Arabic. Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco have adopted official policies of Arabization; yet two decades after independence in Morocco and Tunisia and a slightly lesser period for Algeria, many sections of the government bureaucracy continue to be run in French. Indeed, proportionately more Moroccans speak French today than was the case in the colonial era. The French language remains significant in the schools as well, although Arabization at the elementary and secondary levels is progressing. A network of French educational institutions formally intended for the children of the remaining French still exists, but the proportion of children from elite North African families is steadily increasing. In the government-run schools in North Africa, French continues to be important as a secondary language.

ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY: PRACTICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Anthropologists are now as much at home in cities, towns, villages, and regions encapsulated within modern and complex societies as in the rapidly disappearing isolated and small-scale societies. As a result, it becomes a more pressing question of how the microsociological technique of fieldwork—the intensive, totalistic study of social forms in smaller, face-to-face settings—contributes to understanding larger units of society. How can the microsociological study of an anthropologist contribute to the understanding of larger entities such as nation-states? As Clifford Geertz asked with characteristic irony: "Are the petty squabbles of barnyard notables really what we mean by politics? Are mud huts and goat-skin tents really where the action is?"²⁵ Is there not the danger of getting lost in "mindless descriptivism" in the study of a pilgrimage center in Morocco or a tribe in the Yemen, or at least of learning more about these entities than one really wants to know?

This book demonstrates that anthropologists, or most anthropologists anyway, study specific places, not for themselves or for the love of minute description of routine events in exotic places but to learn something beyond them. Anthropologists do intensive analyses of political, economic, symbolic,

²⁴ See William Fierman, "Independence and the Declining Priority of Language Law Implementation in Uzbekistan," in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i, Cummings Center Series (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 205-30.

²⁵ Clifford Geertz, "Comments," in *Rural Politics and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. Richard Antoun and Iliya Harik (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 460. This discussion owes much to Geertz's succinct presentation of the issues in pp. 460-67 of the Antoun and Harik volume.

and historical processes on a small scale. As with other disciplines in the social sciences, we use data as a means of making hypotheses about larger wholes. As Geertz emphasizes, the question is not whether we generalize—any science generalizes—but how we generalize. In the human sciences, the microsociological technique of anthropology offers an alternative to the tendency to speak of tribe and peasants or of rulers and ruled as if they were stock characters in a sociological morality play.²⁶ Given the significant linguistic, cultural, and political diversity of the Middle East and Central Asia, facile generalizations about common characteristics often prove misleading and deceptive.

Anthropologists are particularly concerned with eliciting the taken-for-granted, shared meanings that underlie conduct in given societies and that are so familiar a part of routine that they are taken to be “natural.” It is against such undramatic backgrounds that citizens participate in nation-states or have contact with the governments of such entities or even form a part of such governments. The petty squabbles of barnyard notables may not in themselves be of compelling interest, but they frequently offer a more advantageous means of determining the components of a political style than the more formal and generally less accessible deliberations of parliaments and cabinet meetings. The link between the unit of the anthropologist’s study and the larger whole is not that of microcosm to macrocosm—as an earlier generation of community studies often naively assumed—but merely that of an arena of study that permits the elaboration of hypotheses about certain social and cultural processes.

Through the study of such mundane events as patterns of naming, seeking a husband or wife, the ways in which sickness is cured, settling a dispute, selling a sheep, local elections, and religious ceremonies, anthropologists seek to grasp what is distinctly Moroccan about Moroccan markets, Lebanese about Lebanese political factionalism, Alevi about Alevi conceptions of Islam, Omani about Omani notions of honor, or Egyptian about Egyptian styles of etiquette and deference. The microsociological perspective of the anthropologist can often provide valuable insights into just how participation in such larger entities is experienced. Through comparison of different societies and cultures and through careful attention to technique and theoretical assumptions, anthropologists seek an understanding of what is distinctive about general processes operating in specific historical and cultural settings. The following chapter indicates how ideas about what constitutes an adequate description of Middle Eastern and Central Asian societies have changed over the past century and a half. It suggests how “objective” assumptions about any society, including one’s own, are linked to the social contexts in which, and for which, they are produced.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 463.

FURTHER READINGS

For an excellent, succinct discussion of the archaeology and history of ancient Mesopotamia and its shifting regional boundaries, see *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The Middle East and Central Asia are on the periphery of *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); however, the historical “re-imagining” of conventional geographical frontiers directly contributes to understanding how the Middle Eastern and Central Asian civilizations have complemented one another over long periods of time. See especially the discussion of “Animals and Their Masters: Nomads and Nomadism,” pp. 263–96, which also pertains to Chapter 4 of this book. Also see “Central Asia’s Place in the Middle East,” in *Central Asia Meets the Middle East*, ed. David Menashri (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 25–51. For contemporary Central Asia, see *The New Central Asia* (New York: New York University Press, 2000 [French orig., 1997]).

For Middle Eastern minorities, see *Middle Eastern Minorities: Between Integration and Conflict* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999). For Iran, see *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).