

# Editorial Foreword

*The Imperial State in the Middle Ages*. At first glance the empires discussed in this issue have in common only their position in time, later than the ancient empires studied in some of the most famous of comparative works (in *CSSH*, Miles in 32:4; Adams, 26:1) and yet not really part of modern imperialism. All the more interesting, therefore, are the attributes that they turn out to have shared. Anatoly Khazanov's comment that Mongol and Arab empires spread in part as a way of solving internal problems is applicable to Inca and Spaniard, too. Peter Gose's argument that Inca administration and religious ritual reinforced each other has meaning for Islam and Spanish Catholicism as well. Anthony Stevens-Arroyo's discussion of an environmental niche as a help in resolving the striking contrast his essay raises has obvious relevance to the desert-based and water-obsessed empires of Arab and Inca. Religion is considered in each of these articles, and each emphasizes its centrality to the very nature of empire while insisting that religion had a kind of integrated autonomy such that religious belief could not foretell the course of imperial policy and religion's functional roles could not contain religious belief or practice.

The articles in this rubric are alike in another, and perhaps more important, respect. They treat important topics on which a vast amount has been written, apply their command of that literature in addressing issues recognized through comparison, and provide significant answers. In his striking comparison of the Mongol and early Islamic empires, Khazanov highlights important aspects of each, including their contrasting responses to the challenges of nomadic society (note Lindner, 24:4) and to the loyalties of tribe and kinship (also see Lindholm, 28:2); and reaches still more broadly in suggesting that the Arabs faced a world in a way more heterogeneous than the one from which Jenghiz Khan expanded, that religious development may require an uncomfortable tension between the transcendental and the mundane, and that without religion the Mongols hardly created a civilization at all. Theory serves the role of comparative cases in Gose's discussion, and he quietly challenges a number of familiar assumptions in his intricate reconstruction of the intersections between a system of belief and the practice of power, the renewal of life and the control of water, origin myths and a segmentary state (see Silverblatt on the Inca empire, 30:1). Through the neatest comparison of all—the sur-

prisingly different imperial fates of two sets of islands on each edge of the Atlantic—Stevens-Arroyo treats some of the grand issues of the *Reconquista* and Spanish empire (compare Burns, 30:2; Altman 30:1; Glick and Pi-Sunyer, 11:2), ever a great morality play which in this focus measures the end of an era and is filled with ironies as the vectors of survival, assimilation, religion, and economics point in unexpected directions.

*Labor Systems.* Long a favorite means of classifying societies, the study of labor systems is nowadays more likely to proceed phenomenologically, in terms of practice seen from the bottom up. Thus Vincent J. Rosivach writes about slavery, a well-established subject of comparison (see Brunt, 7:3; Sio, 7:3; Finley, 6:3), not in terms of systemic differences in law or economy but rather in terms of concrete similarities. Arguing by analogy from the practice of slavery in the northern colonies of North America, he makes us rethink our view of Greek slavery (usually imagined on the basis of quite different analogies). Valentine Daniel ties to language the daily chores of pruning and plucking tea plants, then explores both with a philosophic rigor the printed page does not often get and an exegetical sensitivity poets might envy. Manual workers, like scholars, can see a whole world of experience in their labors (see Smith, 26:4; Reddy, 21:2; Miller, 11:3); but Daniel goes beyond that to reveal bit by bit the agent is not the emancipation that comes with the Tamil laborers' creation of their own history (note White, to appear in 35:4). Zachary Lockman is also committed to showing how Palestinian and Israeli laborers made their own history (until in this instance, too, ethnic conflict and violence disrupted their interaction, compare Rosenfeld, 20:3, and Kratoska, 24:2). The temptation is strong to respond nostalgically to this account of cooperation once possible between Palestinian and Jewish railroad workers, but Lockman warns against that, arguing instead for a different reading of the region's history, acknowledging the mutual influence of peoples who ended up at loggerheads.

*CSSH Discussion.* While changing the world, the transformations in Eastern Europe also offer a remarkable opportunity to test theories of political culture, and that is what David Lempert rather daringly does. Combining observations from his own anthropological fieldwork and models of the state derived from political theory, he reaches some discouraging conclusions about change in contemporary Russia and some interesting suggestions for revising theory (compare predictions of Russia's future based on ideas of convergence, 20:2; note earlier Russian responses to the United States, Kelley, 26:4; Rogger, 23:3; and still earlier reactions to Western models, Kingston-Mann, 33:1).