

Period 1: 1200-1450 Big Pictures

Unit 1: Global Tapestry

Between 1200 and 1450, several large empires emerged around the world. Some were modified revivals of earlier empires in their region. Others represented new developments. All were shaped by the context of regional trade, which had been increasing since around 600.

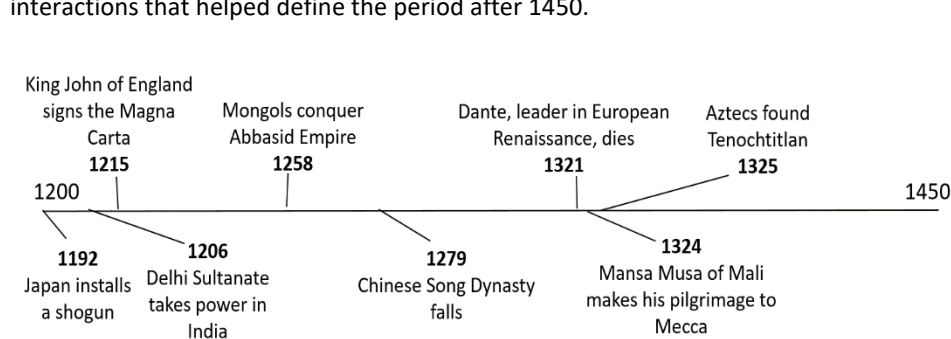
The Revival of Large Empires

Between 1200 and 1450, the wealthiest and most innovative empire in the world was the Song Dynasty in China. It was the latest in a series of states that had ruled a unified and prosperous China. Similarly, in Mesoamerica, the rise of the Aztec was influenced by an earlier empire under the Mayans. Two other centers of great intellectual achievement, Baghdad and Spain, reflected the emphasis on learning in the Islamic world.

However, in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, the growth of regional trade produced larger and more complex states than had previously existed in those regions. Trade across the Sahara resulted in the West African empires of Ghana and Mali. Trade in the Indian Ocean provided the context for larger states in Zimbabwe in East Africa and various states in India and Southeast Asia.

Unity in Central Eurasia

Shaping the context for events throughout Eurasia between 1200 and 1450 was the remarkable emergence of the Mongols. A group of nomads from Central Asia, the Mongols, conquered lands from central Europe to the Pacific Ocean, created the largest continual land empire in human history. The conquest came with great devastation. However, the unity of so much territory under the rule of one group allowed trade to flourish once again across Eurasia, with new ideas and technology spreading easily. These developments set the stage for the intensifying global interactions that helped define the period after 1450.



Unit 2: Networks of Exchange

Between 1200 and 1450, economic activity along existing trade routes increased in volume and scope. Technology and commercial innovations, imperial expansion, and demand for luxury goods were key factors in the ongoing expansion of trade. Growing trade networks accelerated cultural, biological, and technological diffusion across Afro-Eurasia.

Factors that Expanded Trade

Between 1200 and 1450, the rise of powerful states and empires played a critical role in increasing the volume and geographical reach of existing trade networks. The Mongol Empire promoted trade along the Silk Roads creating a vast commercial network across Eurasia. Trade routes across the Sahara and the Indian Ocean added both West Africa and East Africa to this network. Improvements to previously existing commercial practices, including forms of credit, facilitated larger networks of exchange. Driving this growth in trade was a growing demand for luxury goods, such as silk and porcelain from China and gold from Africa.

Consequences of Trade

In the context of this growing trade, powerful new trading cities emerged scattered across Africa and Eurasia. Trade provided the setting for significant cross-cultural exchanges. As merchants and other travelers moved from place to place, they introduced religious beliefs such as Islam and developments in technology such as paper making and gunpowder to new communities. Against the backdrop of this transfer of ideas and things came the rapid spread of deadly diseases, most notably the bubonic plague.

World History: Modern [1200-present]. Advanced placement edition ed., Des Moines, Perfection Learning, 2020. AMSCO.

