

AP World History Course Key Concepts

Period 3 – Regional and Trans-regional Interactions, c. 600 CE to c. 1450

Key Concept 3.1. Expansion and Intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

Although Afro-Eurasia and the Americas remained separate from one another, this era witnessed a deepening and widening of old and new networks of human interaction within and across regions. The results were unprecedented concentrations of wealth and the intensification of cross-cultural exchanges. Innovations in transportation, state policies and mercantile practices contributed to the expansion and development of commercial networks, which in turn served as conduits for cultural, technological and biological diffusion within and between various societies. Pastoral or nomadic groups played a key role in creating and sustaining these networks. Expanding networks fostered greater interregional borrowing, while at the same time sustaining regional diversity.

I. Improved transportation technologies and commercial practices led to an increased volume of trade, and expanded the geographical range of existing and newly active trade networks.

- A. Existing trade routes, including the Silk Roads, the Mediterranean Sea, Trans-Saharan and the Indian Ocean basins, flourished and promoted the growth of powerful new trading cities (such as — to mention just a few — Novgorod, Timbuktu, Swahili city-states, Hangzhou, Calicut, Baghdad, Melaka and Venice, or in the Americas, Tenochtitlan or Cahokia).
- B. The growth of interregional trade in luxury goods (such as silk and cotton textiles, porcelain, spices, precious metals and gems, slaves or exotic animals) was encouraged by significant innovations in previously existing transportation and commercial technologies, including more sophisticated caravan organization (such as caravanserais or camel saddles); use of the compass, astrolabe and larger ship designs in sea travel; and new forms of credit and monetization (such as bills of exchange, credit, checks or banking houses).
- C. Commercial growth was also facilitated by new state practices (such as the minting of coins or use of paper money), new trading organizations (such as the Hanseatic League) and new state-sponsored commercial infrastructures like the Grand Canal in China.
- D. The expansion of existing empires — including China, the Byzantine Empire and the Caliphates — as well as new empires (such as the Mongols) facilitated Trans-Eurasian trade and communication as new peoples were drawn into their conquerors' economies and trade networks.

II. The movement of peoples caused environmental and linguistic effects.

- A. The expansion and intensification of long-distance trade routes often depended on peoples' understanding of a particular regional environment and their subsequent technological adaptations to them (such as the way Scandinavian Vikings used their longships to travel in coastal and open waters as well as in rivers and estuaries, the way the Arabs and Berbers adapted camels to travel across and around the Sahara, or the way Central Asian pastoral groups used horses to travel in the steppes).
- B. Some migrations had a significant environmental impact, including the migration of the agricultural Bantu-speaking peoples in forested regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, and the maritime migrations of the Polynesian peoples who cultivated transplanted foods and domesticated animals as they moved to new islands.
- C. Some migrations and commercial contacts led to the diffusion of languages throughout a new region or the emergence of new languages (for example, the spread of Bantu languages, the new language of Swahili that developed in East African coastal areas, or the spread of Turkic and Arabic languages).

III. Cross-cultural exchanges were fostered by the intensification of existing, or the creation of new, networks of trade and communication.

- A. Islam expanded from the Arabian Peninsula to many parts of Afro-Eurasia due to military expansion and the activities of merchants and missionaries.
- B. In key places along important trade routes, merchants set up diasporic communities where they introduced their own cultural traditions into the indigenous culture (such as Muslim merchant communities in the Indian Ocean region, Chinese merchant communities in Southeast Asia, Sogdian merchant communities throughout Central Asia or Jewish communities in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean basin, or along the Silk Roads).
- C. The writings of certain interregional travelers (such as Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo or Xuanzang) illustrate both the extent and the limitations of intercultural knowledge and understanding.
- D. Increased cross-cultural interactions resulted in the diffusion of literary, artistic and cultural traditions (such as the influence of Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism in East Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism in Southeast Asia, Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia or Toltec/Mexica and Inca traditions in Mesoamerica and Andean America).
- E. Increased cross-cultural interactions also resulted in the diffusion of scientific and technological traditions (such as the influence of Greek and Indian mathematics on Muslim scholars, the return of Greek science and philosophy to Western Europe via Muslim al-Andalus in Iberia or the spread of printing and gunpowder technologies from East Asia into the Islamic empires and Western Europe).

IV. There was continued diffusion of crops and pathogens throughout the Eastern Hemisphere along the trade routes.

- A. New foods were adopted in populated areas (such as bananas in Africa, new rice varieties in East Asia or the Muslim Agricultural Revolution).
- B. The spread of epidemic diseases, including the Black Death, followed the well-established paths of trade and military conquest.

Key Concept 3.2. Continuity and Innovation of State Forms and Their Interactions

State formation in this era demonstrated remarkable continuity, innovation and diversity in various regions. In Afro-Eurasia, some states attempted, with differing degrees of success, to preserve or revive imperial structures, while smaller, less-centralized states continued to develop. The expansion of Islam introduced a new concept — the caliphate — to Afro-Eurasian statecraft. Pastoral peoples in Eurasia built powerful and distinctive empires that integrated people and institutions from both the pastoral and agrarian worlds. In the Americas, powerful states developed in both Mesoamerica and the Andean region.

I. Empires collapsed and were reconstituted; in some regions new state forms emerged.

- A. Following the collapse of empires, most reconstituted governments, including the Byzantine Empire and the Chinese dynasties — Sui, Tang and Song — combined traditional sources of power and legitimacy (such as patriarchy, religion or land-owning elites) with innovations better suited to the current circumstances (such as new methods of taxation, tributary systems or adaptation of religious institutions).
- B. In some places, new forms of governance emerged, including those developed in various Islamic states (such as the Abbasids, the Muslim Iberia or the Delhi Sultanates), the Mongol Khanates and city-states (such as in the Italian peninsula, East Africa or Southeast Asia).
- C. Some states synthesized local and borrowed traditions (such as Persian traditions that influenced Islamic states or Chinese traditions that influenced Japan).
- D. In the Americas, as in Afro-Eurasia, state systems expanded in scope and reach: Networks of city-states flourished in the Maya region and, at the end of this period, imperial systems were created by the Mexica (“Aztecs”) and Inca.

II. Interregional contacts and conflicts between states and empires encouraged significant technological and cultural transfers, for example between Tang China and the Abbasids, across the Mongol empires and during the Crusades.

Key Concept 3.3. Increased Economic Productive Capacity and Its Consequences

Changes in trade networks resulted from and stimulated increasing productive capacity, with important implications for social and gender structures and environmental processes. Productivity rose in both agriculture and industry. Rising productivity supported population growth and urbanization but also strained environmental resources and at times caused dramatic demographic swings. Shifts in production and the increased volume of trade also stimulated new labor practices, including adaptation of existing patterns of free and coerced labor. Social and gender structures evolved in response to these changes.

I. Innovations stimulated agricultural and industrial production in many regions.

- A. Agricultural production increased significantly due to technological innovations (such as Champa rice varieties, the chinampa field systems, *waru waru* agricultural techniques in the Andean areas, improved terracing techniques or the horse collar).
- B. In response to increasing demand in Afro-Eurasia for foreign luxury goods, crops (such as sugar or citrus) were transported from their indigenous homelands to equivalent climates in other regions.
- C. Chinese, Persian, and Indian artisans and merchants also expanded their production of textiles and porcelains for export; industrial production of iron and steel expanded in China.

II. The fate of cities varied greatly, with periods of significant decline, and with periods of increased urbanization buoyed by rising productivity and expanding trade networks.

- A. Factors that contributed to declines of urban areas in this period included invasions, disease, the decline of agricultural productivity and the Little Ice Age.
- B. Factors that contributed to urban revival included the end of invasions, the availability of safe and reliable transport, the rise of commerce and the warmer temperatures between 800 and 1300. Increased agricultural productivity and subsequent rising population and greater availability of labor also contributed to urban growth.
- C. While cities in general continued to play the roles they had played in the past as governmental, religious and commercial centers, many older cities declined at the same time that numerous new cities took on these established roles.

NOTE: Students should be able to explain the cultural, religious, commercial and governmental function of at least two major cities.

III. Despite significant continuities in social structures and in methods of production, there were also some important changes in labor management and in the effect of religious conversion on gender relations and family life.

- A. As in the previous period, the main forms of labor organization included free peasant agriculture, nomadic pastoralism, craft production and guild organization, along with various forms of coerced and unfree labor and government-imposed labor taxes and military obligations.
- B. As in the previous period, social structures were shaped largely by class and caste hierarchies. Patriarchy persisted; however, in some areas, women exercised more power and influence, most notably among the Mongols and in West Africa, Japan and Southeast Asia.
- C. New forms of coerced labor appeared, including serfdom in Europe and Japan and the elaboration of the *mit'a* in the Inca Empire. Free peasants resisted attempts to raise dues and taxes by staging revolts (such as in China or the Byzantine Empire). The demand for slaves for both military and domestic purposes increased, particularly in central Eurasia, parts of Africa and the eastern Mediterranean.
- D. The diffusion of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Neo-Confucianism often led to significant changes in gender relations and family structure.