

Summary: New Ideas in Europe

The Renaissance

Many changes took place in Europe in the 1300s and 1400s. This period was called the Renaissance, which means rebirth. People explored the ideas of ancient Greeks, Romans, and other peoples.

Learning led to new technology. The printing press was developed in 1454. Before then people copied books by hand. A printing press could print a page of type quickly. More books were made, and new ideas spread widely and rapidly.

New ideas also changed navigation. North Africans taught Europeans to use the astrolabe. It told them how far north or south they were. The North Africans also taught Europeans to use a compass. It allowed sailors to steer without seeing stars or sun.

Gunpowder was a Chinese invention. Europeans used it in guns and cannons. They felt they could protect themselves if they were attacked when exploring new places.

A Sea Route to Asia

Europeans were eager to trade with Asia. Merchants could make big profits selling Asian goods, such as spices and silk. People in Europe loved spices like pepper.

Europeans knew a sea route would be faster than the Silk Road. In Portugal, Prince Henry started a navigation school to encourage explorers. Mapmakers, shipbuilders, and sea captains worked together to share their knowledge. They designed and built faster ships that were good for exploring.

Portuguese traders exploring the coast of West Africa captured Africans and forced them into slavery. Enslaved people were sold in Europe.

In 1487, Bartolomeu Dias was blown off course by a storm. His ship reached the eastern side of Africa. The Portuguese named the tip of Africa the Cape of Good Hope. They knew then that they could sail around Africa to get to Asia. In 1497, Vasco da Gama first took that route to India. Portuguese ships soon used the route to trade spices.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

technology *noun*, the use of scientific knowledge and tools to do things better and more rapidly.

navigation *noun*, the science of planning and controlling the direction of a ship

astrolabe *noun*, a navigation tool that measures the height of the sun or a star against the horizon

profit *noun*, money left after all expenses have been paid

slavery *noun*, a cruel system in which people are bought and sold and made to work without pay



After You Read

REVIEW What did new technology do to make exploration easier?

Underline the sentence that tells why a compass was useful. Highlight the sentence that tells why Europeans liked guns.

REVIEW Why was sailing around the Cape of Good Hope important? Underline the sentence that tells why Europeans wanted to find a sea route to Asia.