

Summary: World Travel and Trade

Trade with China

Before 1500, there was almost no contact between the Eastern and Western hemispheres. Most people in Europe, Asia, and Africa did not know the Americas existed. Often, merchants were the first to travel to distant places looking for new goods to trade.

In 1271, Marco Polo traveled from Italy to China. He wrote a book about his adventures. He told about a trade route that connected Europe and China. It was called the Silk Road. He described inventions, such as paper, printing, and gunpowder. Merchants became rich by bringing silks, spices, and other goods to Europe.

In 1405, the Chinese began exploring and trading with people in distant places. Admiral Zheng He sailed with hundreds of ships throughout Southeast Asia to the east coast of Africa. In 1434, the new ruler of China stopped all Chinese exploration.

African Trading Kingdoms

People in Africa also traded. Some West African kingdoms became powerful through trade. In the 700s, Ghana was rich in gold but did not have enough salt. Salt was used to keep food from spoiling. Merchants from Arabia crossed the Sahara in big caravans to trade salt for gold.

Arab merchants taught people in Ghana about their religion, Islam. Many people in Ghana became followers of Islam. By 1240, the kingdom of Mali conquered Ghana. Mali's cities became new trade centers. One of its most important cities was Timbuktu. In 1324, Mali's ruler, Mansa Musa, traveled to Mecca. Mecca was the most holy city in Arabia. He set up trading agreements.

When he returned to Mali, he brought scholars and artists from Arabia with him. They made Timbuktu an important center for learning and art. In 1468, a new kingdom called Songhai took over most of Mali. The kingdom grew weaker after Mansa Musa's rule, but trade continued for over a hundred years.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

merchant *noun*, someone who buys and sells goods to earn money

kingdom *noun*, a place ruled by a king or queen

caravan *noun*, a group of people and animals who travel together



After You Read

REVIEW What was the importance of the Silk Road? The Silk Road connected Europe to which country? Underline the sentence that tells you the answer.

REVIEW What effect did trade with North Africa have on Ghana's culture? What did Arab merchants teach the people of Ghana? What did the people of Ghana convert to? Highlight the sentences that tell the answer.