

CHAPTER 21-REACHING OUT: CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

From 1000 to 1500 C.E., trade increased and expanded across Eurasia with goods moving both along the silk roads and across the Indian Ocean basin. Trading cities and ports grew, as did the communities of foreign merchants. Those that grew the fastest, such as Melaka, were orderly and business-friendly. Even the Mongols helped this process by restoring order to the silk roads. It was in this environment that Marco Polo (1253-1324) traveled from Italy to China and opened the way for future travelers and merchants.

These routes were also used for political purposes. The Mongols and the Western Europeans sent envoys to try and unite against the Muslims. In 1287 Rabban Suama, a Christian, was sent by the Mongol ilkan of Persia to form an alliance with Western European nations. Along with trade and politics, religion also traveled these routes. The Muslim Sufi missionaries traveled into lands newly conquered by the Muslims and spread their religion. The Christian John of Montecorvino traveled these routes reaching Beijing in 1307 and built several churches in China.

The exchanges along these routes included new crops: fruits, rice, cotton, and especially sugarcane, which fostered plantations in the Mediterranean basin and the slave labor needed to grow it. Diseases, such as the Bubonic plague, were unexpected travelers along trade routes and had a great impact on history. Starting in China and spreading west to Europe in the 1300s, Bubonic plague killed millions, in some cases wiping out two-thirds of the population of an area, causing social disruption and economic problems.

Recovery in China during this period began as the Ming drove the Mongols out of China. The Ming established a centralized government based on Confucian principles, the civil service exam, direct rule by the emperor, and the use of representatives to communicate with local authorities. The Ming prompted economic recovery by repairing irrigation systems and increasing the manufacturing sector. In the west, trade and taxes gave monarchs the ability to consolidate their power. It is during this period that the formation of nation-states in France, England, and Spain occurred. Spain also instituted the *reconquista* to drive the last of the Muslims out of Spain. The best-known example of recovery during this period is the Italian Renaissance and the art, architecture, and philosophy that came out of that period.

Combined with trade, there is also exploration and colonization. One of the great navigators was Zheng He of China, whose fleets of huge ships sailed the Indian Ocean both to trade with and impress foreign peoples. His travels mark the height of Chinese ocean trade but also caused mistrust in the government, and the voyages ended in 1433. The first to sail from Western Europe were the Portuguese. They sailed over the Atlantic Ocean, colonizing the uninhabited Azores and Madeira islands located about 1,000 miles west of Portugal. These sailors, backed by Italian investors, began sugarcane cultivation in these areas. As these plantations grew, the need for labor caused the Portuguese to increase the traffic in African slaves. Later, the Portuguese sailors Dias and da Gamma moved south and east around the tip of

Africa,, into the Indian Ocean and soon dominated the trade between Europe and Asia. Using gunpowder technology, the Portuguese began the process of imperialism in Asia. Spain, in competition with both the Portuguese and the Muslims for a trade empire, sent Columbus west to find the riches of Asia in 1492.

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

- 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.

Key Concept 4.1. Globalizing Networks of Communication and Exchange

- II. European technological developments in cartography and navigation built on previous knowledge developed in the classical, Islamic and Asian worlds, and included the production of new tools (*such as the astrolabe or revised maps*), innovations in ship designs (*such as caravels*), and an improved understanding of global wind and currents patterns all of which made transoceanic travel and trade possible.
- III. Remarkable new transoceanic maritime reconnaissance occurred in this period.