

# The American Nation

## *Chapter 2 / Section 3*

### *Trade Networks of Africa and Asia*

#### **I. The Muslim World**

Arabia's location in the Middle East made it a major crossroads of the world. It stood at the center of trade routes that linked the Mediterranean world in the west with Asia in the east and Africa in the south.

##### *A. Rise and Spread of Islam*

The growth of trade was also linked to the growth of a new religion. In the early 600s, a new religion, Islam emerged in Arabia. Its founder was the prophet Muhammad. The central teaching of Islam was belief in one God. Followers of Islam, called Muslims, believed that the Quran, the sacred book of Islam, contained the exact word of God as revealed to Muhammad.

Muhammad won many followers among the Arabs. After his death in 632, Islam spread rapidly. Islam expanded through trade and conquest. Many people in conquered lands chose to convert to the successful new religion. Islam united Muslims from many lands. Muslims had a basic duty to make a pilgrimage, or journey, to the holy city of Mecca at least once in their lives.

##### *B. Trade Routes*

Muslim merchants traded across a vast area. They sailed to ports around the Indian Ocean. Their ships used large, triangular sails that allowed captains to use the wind even if it changed direction.

Muslim sailors had expert knowledge of wind and weather conditions of the Indian Ocean. As a result, merchants in ports around the region knew when the trading ships had to sail and when they would return.

##### *C. Silk Road*

Some Muslim traders travelled the overland routes that crossed the grasslands, mountains, and deserts of Central Asia and linked China and the Middle East. These routes had become known as the Silk Road because prized Chinese silks had been carried westward along them for more than 2,000 years.

Travel on the Silk Road was dangerous. Desert storms, hunger, and bandits were a constant threat. Traders formed caravans, or groups of people who traveled together for safety. By the 1400s, trade goods flowed across a huge area. Muslim merchants sold fine porcelains from China, cloth from India, ivory and gold from East Africa, and spices from Southeast Asia.

## **II. African Trading States and Cultures**

Trade routes played a large role in Africa, too. Long-distance trade routes crossed the vast Sahara, the desert linking West Africa and North Africa.

### *A. City-States of East Africa*

Trade had long flowed up and down the coast of east Africa. Small villages that had good natural harbors grew into busy trading centers.

Gold from Zimbabwe, a powerful inland state, was carried to coastal cities such as Kilwa and Sofala. From there, ships carried the gold, and prized goods such as hardwoods and ivory across the Indian Ocean to India and China.

Wealth from trade helped local East African rulers build strong city-states. A city-state is a large town that has its own government and controls the surrounding countryside.

### *B. Trading Kingdoms of West Africa*

A region of grasslands, called the savanna, covers much of West Africa. Several rich trading kingdoms emerged there. Among the best known were Mali and Songhai. The city of Timbuktu was a major trading center for both kingdoms.

The kingdom of Mali rose in about A.D. 1200 and flourished for about 200 years. Mali's most famous ruler, Mansa Musa, was a Muslim. In 1324, the emperor stopped in Cairo, Egypt. His wealth in gold amazed the Egyptians.

In the 1400s, Songhai emerged as the most powerful kingdom in West Africa. Muslim emperors extended Songhai's power and made Timbuktu into a thriving city.

### *C. Village and Family Life*

Ways of life varied greatly across the huge continent of Africa. While powerful trading states flourished in some regions, most people lived outside these kingdoms. Many lived in small villages. They made a living by herding, fishing, or farming. Although family patterns varied across Africa, many people lived within an extended family. In an extended family, several generations live in one household. The grandparents, or elders, received special respect for their wisdom and knowledge. Ties of kinship, or sharing a common ancestor, linked families. Religious beliefs varied widely across Africa. Yet, African beliefs reflected some common threads.

## **III. Chinese Voyages of Trade and Exploration**

Africa had many different cultures and kingdoms. By contrast, in China, power was centered on the emperor. Although most Chinese rulers allowed trade, they were often suspicious of outsiders. After all, they thought, outsiders did not speak Chinese or follow Chinese ways.

### *A. The Great Treasure Fleet*

The young emperor who came to power in 1402 was eager for trade. He ordered a huge fleet to be built and named Zheng He (DZUNG HEH) to command it. Zheng He's fleet numbered more than 300 ships. It carried about 28,000 sailors and tons of trade goods.

Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He made several long voyages.

### *B. The Voyages End*

Soon after Zhenh He's death in 1435, China's overseas voyages abruptly ended. A new emperor decided that china had nothing to learn from the outside world. He outlawed foreign travel.

### *C. What might Have Been*

Historians sometimes discuss what might have happened if events ad taken a slightly different course. One question historians ponder is what if Zheng He had led his fleet around the southern tip of Africa or across the pacific.

Chinese ships could certainly have made such long voyages. They were much larger than the ships commanded by Christopher Columbus in 1492.

Chinese ships; 400ft long

Columbus's ships; 59ft long

*There is historical evidence that the Chinese actually "discovered" America in 1421. Since the Chinese did not colonize the America's, their discovery is generally overlooked.*