

# Chapter Two:

## The Global Context: Asia, Europe, and Africa in the Early Modern Era

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The period before European contact with the Americas marked the beginning of globalization. During this time, the world became, in a sense, both larger and smaller. Voyages of exploration captured the immensity of the earth in maps, images, and the writings of travelers; simultaneously, emerging webs of connection between regions and peoples brought the world closer together. Thus, we often refer to this period as the “early modern era.” For the first time, we see the emergence of a world that bears great similarity to ours of the twenty-first century, a world interconnected through trade, politics, culture, and religion. China took the lead in oceanic exploration in the early fifteenth century, but by mid-century leaders stopped seeking overseas markets. They preferred to let the trade come to them. Chinese efforts gave way to the much more aggressive Portugal and Spain who competed for control of the Atlantic in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Both countries had engaged in overland trade with the Islamic world in the Middle Ages and hoped to find alternatives to the land routes used to conduct business with the Indies. Meanwhile, England and France largely ignored the trend of oceanic exploration in the sixteenth century. While their leaders witnessed the success the Portuguese and Spanish had, internal problems blunted their ability to sponsor expeditions. As the European nations expanded their presence in the Atlantic Ocean, they also drew many African kingdoms into their global web. The European exploration of the early sixteenth century set the stage for later colonization in the Americas.

#### 2.1.1 Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Analyze the roles the emergence of a more powerful monarchy and religious changes played in the development of England and France in the Age of Discovery.
- Compare the goals and outcomes of early Chinese and Iberian voyages during this era.
- Evaluate the development of early globalization through exploration and trade.
- Analyze the connections between new technologies and the growth of the Age of Discovery.
- Evaluate the role of Africa in the period before contact.

## 2.2 EUROPE IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERY: PORTUGAL AND SPAIN

Spain and Portugal led the European Age of Discovery, an era lasting from roughly 1450-1750, in technological advances, exploration, and colonization. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they emerged as leaders in this age; after all, the Iberian Peninsula protrudes out from Europe into the Atlantic Ocean, and rivers and harbors provided an ideal environment for sea trade as well as nurturing the art of boat building. Both countries had been incorporated into the Islamic world during much of the Middle Ages and emerged as newly reformulated kingdoms in the period leading into the Age of Discovery. Each sought to push forth from their geographic boundaries and, in so doing, enrich their kingdoms through exploration and trade.

### 2.2.1 Portugal Initiates the Age of Discovery

Portugal emerged as a nation in 1128 after the Battle of São Mamede with the defeat of the Moors, which is the Iberian name for the Muslims who invaded and controlled parts of the Iberian Peninsula from around 711 to 1492. After the re-conquest or *Reconquista* of Portugal was finalized in 1250 with the conquest of the south, Portugal began a period of great development in navigation. Instruments such as the compass and the astrolabe, which were Chinese and Arabian inventions respectively, allowed the Portuguese to successfully navigate the open sea above and below the equator. Improvements in cartography produced maps that were much more accurate than those of the Middle Ages. The Portuguese also developed the *caravel*, a ship with triangular sails and a square rig. A light, agile ship, the *caravel* could carry a large cargo with a small crew. Together, these advances allowed the Portuguese to begin establishing a maritime empire.

Under the sponsorship of [Prince Henry the Navigator](#), Portugal began exploring the coast of Africa in order to trade and extend Christianity. Prince Henry the Navigator was the third son of John I, king of Portugal. He was called “the Navigator” because of his support of navigational studies in Portugal, where he established a school for it.

Like the Spanish and other Europeans, the chief desire of the Portuguese was to tap into the lucrative



**Figure 2.1 Caravel Boa Esperança of Portugal** | The triangular sailed, square rigged caravel was quick, agile, and seaworthy.

**Author:** Navy of Brazil  
**Source:** Wikimedia Commons

spice trade, including items such as cloves, pepper, and ginger. The spice trade, Europeans knew, originated somewhere in Asia and made its way through India before entering the hands of Muslim traders, who brought the product to European markets. Trade with Asia in spices would not only enrich the nation that established contact, but also would weaken the Muslim world and strengthen the Christian world by diverting the overland spice trade to a European sea trade. This promise of great wealth and sense of religious completion drove the Portuguese to explore the coast of Africa in search of a route to India. The same ideas motivated Columbus to seek a route to Asia and the spice trade by sailing west.

The Portuguese established trade networks along the coast of West Africa, trading for gold and, by 1441, for slaves. To facilitate trade, Portuguese captains negotiated relationships with African kingdoms and leaders in port cities, exchanging gifts and goods to secure permission to trade. They established stone fortresses known as *feitorias*, or factories, that served as trading posts and as holding areas for slaves. In later years, other nations such as the Dutch, Spanish, and British followed this pattern as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade emerged, driven by labor-intensive crops such as sugar, rice, and cotton.

The Portuguese explored the coast of Africa not only for profit and religious purpose, but also in search of the mythical kingdom of Prester John. The myth of Prester John emerged in Europe sometime in the twelfth century. Prester John was said to be a Christian monarch somewhere in the Orient—possibly India or Africa—that ruled in the midst of Muslims. Some said he was a descendant of one of the Three Magi; others claimed that the Fountain of Youth was to be found in his kingdom. In any case, Europeans viewed Prester John as a possible ally against the encroachment of Islam and as a powerful Christian figure in the Muslim world. In the late 1400s, Portugal sent ships in search of Prester John; eventually, a Portuguese captain made contact with the African Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. The Portuguese concluded that the Ethiopian monarch was in fact Prester John, even though such a figure would have been several hundred years old by 1500.

Portuguese exploration continued through the end of the fifteenth century. One of the most significant moments came in 1487, when Bartholomew Diaz rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of Africa. A decade later, Vasco da Gama reached the subcontinent of India. This moment was particularly significant, for it marked the Portuguese entry into the lucrative spice trade which, until this time, had been dominated by Muslim traders. From India, the Portuguese continued east, following the spice trade to the so-called Spice Islands, today a part of Indonesia. In 1511, Admiral Alfonso de Albuquerque conquered the city and Strait of Malacca, which controlled all sea trade

between China and India. This capture provided the Portuguese with a port of call at the heart of the spice trade while simultaneously breaking the Arab spice trade network. The conquest of Malacca marked the beginning of a period of great wealth, power, and prosperity for Portugal.

Columbus's 1492 voyage of discovery brought a new sense of competition to the race for the spice trade. In 1494, the Treaty of Tordesillas was negotiated and signed to preserve order and to effectively divide the world's trade routes into spheres of influence. The treaty imagined a line about halfway between the Portuguese-held Cape Verde islands off the coast of Africa and the islands discovered by Columbus, namely Hispaniola and Cuba. Lands and routes to the east belonged to Portugal; lands and routes to the west, to Spain.

### 2.2.2 The Spanish in the Age of Discovery

While 1492 is best known for Christopher Columbus's voyage to the New World, the year was also significant to the Spanish for reasons other than Columbus's "discovery." First and foremost, 1492 marked the end of the long *Reconquista* of the Spanish peninsula with Ferdinand and Isabella's conquest of Grenada, the last area to be held by Muslims. To consolidate their victory and to begin the process of "purifying" their kingdoms, the monarchs issued orders for all Jews and Muslims to make a choice: convert to Christianity or leave Spain. For many of the Spanish, the *Reconquista* had been as much a religious as a military re-conquest of the land. The Roman Catholic Church viewed the Spanish *Reconquista* as a great victory for Christianity; the pope marked the event by granting the monarchs the *Patronado Real*, which gave them powers to oversee the operation of the Church within their realm. The idea of religious conquest and the power of the Spanish monarch to oversee representatives of the Church in later years would play an important role in the New World as the Crown sent thousands of monks to convert Indians to Christianity. Proselytization was of course part of the Christian doctrine, and as good Catholics, the monarchs felt it their duty to convert the natives. Moreover, the Spanish had revisited their identity as Spaniards and as Christians in the wake of hundreds of years of Muslim rule and the *Reconquista*. The newly reformed Spanish identity was unquestionably Christian, and all subjects of the Crown were to belong to the Catholic fold. Thus, the religious conquest would be brought to the New World along with the military conquest.

For Spain, Columbus's voyage joined with the excitement of defeating the Muslims at Grenada. Isabella, Queen of Castile, agreed to support Columbus's enterprise in the hope of great gains for God and Castile. She promised him a title of nobility and 10 percent of the gold, silver, spices,

and other valuables he obtained if he were successful. Columbus sailed in September of 1492 with three ships, fewer than ninety men, a year's provisions, and a fundamental misunderstanding of the size of the earth. Scholars all over Europe argued that Columbus grossly underestimated the distance to Asia. This, along with Columbus's egotistical demeanor and demands for great personal rewards from his expedition, ensured that Columbus failed to enlist other potential backers to finance the voyage.

On October 12, 1492, Columbus and his men sighted an island in the chain later named the Bahamas. Further exploration revealed Hispaniola and Cuba, the two largest islands in the Greater Antilles of the Caribbean. He established a settlement called La Navidad and left thirty-nine men to secure it. Columbus returned to Spain in 1493, convinced that he had reached Asia. He described a tropical paradise and brought back enough gold and valuables to secure permission for a second voyage.

The Caribbean quickly became the base for further Spanish exploration of the region. Within twenty-five years, European explorers and cartographers had sketched a remarkably accurate outline of the Caribbean and the eastern coasts of North, South, and Central America. For a time, Columbus himself served as Governor of the Indies, the name used by the Spanish for the Americas. He was accused of harsh rule and mistreatment of the colonists, who called him "the tyrant of the Caribbean." Columbus was arrested and returned to Spain in chains, where he was stripped of his titles and office for misrule.

Columbus went to his grave believing that his voyages had taken him to Asia. Others, however, argued that he had reached a previously unknown land mass, a so-called "New World." While the Spanish were busy establishing themselves in the Caribbean, Vasco da Gama had made contact with India and thus had "won" the race to tap into the spice trade. Columbus's mathematical errors and fundamental misunderstanding were confirmed in late 1520, when Ferdinand Magellan's fleet entered the Pacific Ocean. Magellan had been commissioned by the Spanish Crown to seek a trade route to Asia; however, what his voyage revealed was the immensity of South America and the Pacific Ocean. Although Magellan died mid-voyage, his fleet became the first to successfully circumnavigate the globe, returning to Spain in 1525. The voyage took an incredible toll on the fleet; of the original 237 men and five ships, only one ship and eighteen men survived.

The legacy of circumnavigation of the globe revealed itself politically, economically, and scientifically. The Treaty of Tordesillas had established that the world was to be divided into two zones of influence; this agreement lacked the exact divide between Portuguese and Spanish territory in the east. Since the Spanish fleet reached Asia and the Moluccas, or the Spice



Islands, they claimed that the Portuguese were violating their territory, thus bringing the two nations once more into conflict. The matter was resolved in 1529 with the Treaty of Zaragoza, which gave the Moluccas to Portugal and the Philippines to Spain. Although Spain was disappointed not to have gained the Spice Islands, the Philippines quickly became an important base of Spanish operations for Asian trade. They obtained particular importance after Spain established mining operations in the colonies of New Spain and Peru, when silver became the basis for great wealth.

Scientifically, Magellan's voyage revealed the exact size of the earth's diameter. It also established the need for an International Date Line. Although the mariners kept strict track of dates over the voyage in a logbook, they found upon their return to Europe that they were one day behind the calendar. They had, in effect, lost a day while traveling westward, counter to the earth's rotation.

### 2.2.3 Before You Move On...

#### Key Concepts

Portugal was one of the leaders of the European Age of Discovery. The Portuguese were able successfully to navigate the open sea because of the compass, the astrolabe, and the *caravel*. Under the sponsorship of Prince Henry the Navigator, the Portuguese explored the coast of Africa and later established trading posts up and down the coast of West Africa. The Portuguese also established trading ports in India and, after the conquest of Malacca, in the Spice Islands. Portugal's entry into the Indian Ocean marked the beginning of a powerful sea empire.

The Spanish followed Portugal's lead after completing the *Reconquista* and sponsoring Columbus's 1492 voyage. Like the Portuguese, Columbus's goal had been to reach Asia to tap into the lucrative spice trade. Columbus instead reached a "New World," and the Spanish found themselves exploring vast new lands. Competition between Portugal and Spain was alleviated with the Treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the earth into two zones of influence. However, competition was reborn when the Spanish circumnavigated the globe in 1520-1525. The Treaty of Zaragoza established the antemeridian of the Treaty of Tordesillas, effectively extending the dividing line into the eastern half of the globe and completing the separation of the zones of influence.

**Test Yourself**

1. What important event(s) took place in 1492?
  - a. Columbus's first voyage to the New World
  - b. the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from Spain
  - c. the end of the Reconquista
  - d. All of the above
  - e. A and C
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ enabled the Portuguese to enter the spice trade.
  - a. Rounding the Cape of Good Hope
  - b. The conquest of Malacca
  - c. The discovery of the New World
  - d. Making contact with Prester John
  - e. The conquest of Goa
  
3. True/False: For the Spanish, reconquering the Iberian Peninsula was a military and religious action.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. The mythical king Prester John was important to the Portuguese because
  - a. he controlled the spice trade
  - b. he would be an ally to the Spanish in reconquering the Iberian Peninsula
  - c. he was a Christian king in an area dominated by Muslims
  - d. he could direct them in how to cross the Indian Ocean
  
5. The Treaty of Tordesillas and the \_\_\_\_\_ worked in tandem to establish zones of influence for Portuguese and Spanish trade.
  - a. Treaty of Nanking
  - b. Treaty of Molucca
  - c. Treaty of Zaragoza
  - d. Treaty of Goa

[Click here to see answers](#)



## 2.3 ASIA IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERY: CHINESE EXPANSION DURING THE MING DYNASTY

By the time Prince Henry, called “the Navigator,” third son of John I of Portugal, established a school for navigational studies at Sagres, Portugal in the third decade of the fifteenth century (around 1433), the Chinese had been engaged in navigational exploration under the Ming Dynasty for more than thirty years. In 1369 the last of the Mongol invaders, who had controlled China since 1294, was defeated by the founder of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang. Zhu chose the name “Ming” or “bright” for his dynasty rather than his family name, Zhu, which means “pig” and called himself “Hong Wu,” which translates to “vast military.”<sup>1</sup>

Hong Wu ruled China from 1368 to 1398, during which time he concentrated on defeating and controlling the last of the Mongols (they were driven out in 1420), expanding the military, and ruling over a diverse kingdom of Confucians, Muslims, and Christians. During the Ming dynasty, the Chinese expanded their rule into Mongolia and Central Asia, and for a brief time, Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> When Hong Wu died, the throne passed to his son, Shu Di, who took the name **Yung Lo**; he is also called the Yongle Emperor. Yung Lo had spent much of his youth undertaking expeditions against the remaining Mongol strongholds, and, when he became emperor, continued Chinese expansion, assisted by the Muslim eunuch, Zheng He, or Cheng Ho. After moving the capital city of his empire to Beijing, he constructed a new, splendid palace, the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, and an impressive observatory. The construction of the Forbidden City took fourteen years to complete and employed 100,000 artisans and one million workers. Yung Lo also began dredging and reconstructing the Grand Canal. In 1417, the Emperor left Nanking for the last time, moving to his new capital city. The Court officially established itself there in 1421.<sup>3</sup>

Not only was Yung Lo intent on creating a splendid new capital city for his empire, he also wanted to expand China’s military and economic control into the areas surrounding the Indian Ocean. Malacca, the third largest state in Malaysia, had become the center of a thriving Indian Ocean trading network in which porcelains, silks, and camphor from China, pepper, cloves, and other spices from the Moluccas, and cotton from India came into the port of Malacca. Yung Lo saw in this area an opportunity for Chinese expansion, and shortly after he became Emperor he chose Zheng He to lead a series of naval voyages from China into the Indian Ocean. Dispute exists among historians about his motivation in this endeavor. Historian John K. Fairbank maintains that “these official expeditions were not voyages of exploration in the Vasco da Gama or Columbian sense. They followed established routes of Arab and Chinese trade in the seas east of Africa.”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, some historians of the twenty-first century have been influenced by the theories of Historian Gavin Menzies, whose best seller, *1421: The Year China Discovered America*, contends that the Chinese did indeed go well beyond the familiar trade routes, not only rounding the Cape of Good Hope, but also traveling to Australia and Central and South America. Menzies supports his theory with the diaries of fifteenth century Portuguese and Spanish conquistadors who encountered “Chinese people” when they arrived in the Americas, as well as with archaeological evidence, such as remains of the familiar blue and white Ming porcelain along the western coast of South America. Menzies believes that Yung Lo’s purpose was two-fold: “to sail the oceans of the world and chart them” in order to inspire awe in the countries of the world and to bring them “under China’s tribute system.”<sup>5</sup>

Although the theories of Menzies have created interest among historians, most scholars hold the view that the Chinese were mainly seeking new tributary nations, generally agreeing with Anatole Andro who comments in *The 1421 Heresy* that, though Menzies’s theories are compelling, additional concrete evidence is needed before his contentions can be accepted as fact.

Whatever his motivation, Yung Lo did in fact commission the construction of a grand fleet. According to Andro Anatole, “The Ming maritime voyages were set in motion the very moment [Yung Lo] ascended the throne. Although the first ships did not set sail until 1405, more than two years into the new reign, preparations for the voyages were underway from day one.”<sup>6</sup> He points out that the project was immense and complicated. Raw materials were not readily available and many were “procured from distant districts.” Artisans came from all parts of the empire, and Zheng He himself had to be trained in navigational methods and cartography, or map reading.

One shipyard near Nanking alone built 2,000 vessels, including almost a hundred large treasure ships. The latter were approximately 400 feet long and almost 200 feet wide. Dragon eyes were carved on the prows to scare away evil spirits.<sup>7</sup> Anatole reminds us that “The large Chinese ships, majestic and impressive, and more than enough to fill with awe a country of lesser stature than the mighty Ming, were first and foremost built for military personnel transport.”<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 2.2 Zheng He’s Ships** | A comparison shows how Zheng He’s treasure ships dwarfed Columbus’s ships.

Author: Lars Plougmann  
Source: Flickr  
License: CC BY SA 2.0

In addition to these large ships were junks belonging to merchants that were, in turn, protected by warships. As the Chinese flotilla progressed, the ships of other nations joined it, in order to secure the protection of the armada's war ships. By the time the armada reached India, seeking such spices as pepper, salt, ginger, and cinnamon, there were 800 ships in the flotilla. According to Fairbank, the armada of 1405-1407 set out with 317 ships. Of these, 62 were treasure ships. In comparison, the famous Spanish Armada that sailed against England in 1588 was made up of only 137 ships.<sup>9</sup>

Zheng He made seven voyages between 1405 and 1433, and, according to historian Louise Levathes's *When China Ruled the Seas: the Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne*, Yung Lo probably had in mind the expansion of the tributary system and the acquisition of information about distant lands and rare plants and animals. She comments that Zheng He went as far west as Egypt in order to gather herbs that might be used to fight a smallpox outbreak that plagued China.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Chinese were interested in the products of other cultures, and though Zheng He brought to China an Arab book on medical remedies, a giraffe, and "300 virgins," Yung Lo's successor, Zhu Zhanji, decided in 1433 to disband this naval effort and "never again were the expeditions resumed." Several possibilities explain this occurrence: the Chinese found nothing in the cultures visited that they could not obtain through trade; after Zheng He's death, no admiral rose to his stature as a sailor; or, according to Fairbank, "anti-commercialism and xenophobia won out."<sup>11</sup> Whatever the reason, the Chinese armada was allowed to fall into disrepair, service



**Figure 2.3 Zheng He's Seventh Expedition** | This Map shows the route of the seventh voyage of Zheng He's fleet, 1431-1433.

**Author:** Vmenkov Menkov  
**Source:** Wikimedia Commons

personnel were placed elsewhere, and a minister of war, Kiu Daxia, burned the navigational charts. Interestingly, the Chinese did not follow up on these voyages of trade and/or exploration, even though they were the inventors of gunpowder and the cannon, instruments necessary for European expansion as they struck out to find an all-water route to India.

What remains is this question: why did the Chinese take this approach, becoming in essence isolationists? Menzies suggests that superstition got the best of the culture as a series of natural disasters portended future catastrophe.<sup>12</sup> Historian Ray Huang blames it on the extravagances of Yung Lo, and Fairbank, on Neo-Confucian prejudice against expansion.<sup>13</sup> Historian L. Carrington Goodrich concedes that “the expeditions ceased as suddenly as they began, again for reasons only guessed at,” though the expense and the “spirit of isolationism” that “penetrated the Court” were certainly factors.<sup>14</sup> Most scholars concede that, while various explanations exist, the “abrupt discontinuance” of China’s outreach remains “one of the most fascinating enigmas in the history of the culture.”<sup>15</sup> Whatever the reason, the Chinese did reap the benefits of expanded tribute, and the Chinese people participated in a “vast immigration” into Southeast Asia, taking with them Chinese knowledge and culture.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3.1 Before You Move On...

#### Key Concepts

The establishment of the Ming Dynasty in China in 1439 brought an end to Mongol rule and began a new era. The Forbidden City, the seat of Chinese rule in the following centuries and a lasting symbol of Chinese power, was built during this period. It was during this time also that the Chinese first undertook substantial oceanic voyages, far earlier than their European counterparts. Zheng He’s massive fleet dwarfed European expeditions of the era, both in the number and the size of ships. The armadas explored much of the Indian Ocean region, as far as Africa, mapping, charting, trading, and incorporating a great part of the region into a Chinese tributary system. Although a few historians have suggested that Zheng He’s fleet sailed as far as Australia and the Americas, compelling documentary evidence for this is lacking.

When the Ming Emperor Yung Lo died, Chinese participation in naval expansion died with him. The succeeding emperors did not follow up on the voyages of the early fifteenth century, and by the end of the century had begun a policy that would typify Chinese attitudes toward trade with overseas cultures: if foreign powers wanted to trade with China, they could bring their goods to her shores, in their own ships. And eventually, even this trade was limited to the port of Canton only.

**Test Yourself**

1. Zheng He's goals for exploring the Indian Ocean included
  - a. exploring and mapping the region.
  - b. establishing trade with port cities.
  - c. incorporating new areas into the Chinese tribute system.
  - d. all of the above.
  - e. none of the above.
  
2. One possible reason for Zhu Zhanji's decision to end the voyages of Zheng He was
  - a. a spirit of isolationism in the Chinese court under Zhu Zhanji.
  - b. to save money and avoid the expense of the voyages.
  - c. to end competition with the French, who were entering the Indian Ocean trade.
  - d. A and B.
  - e. all of the above.

[Click here to see answers](#)

## 2.4 EUROPE IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERY: ENGLAND AND FRANCE

In the period before contact with the Americas, England and France, as they appear on the map today, had only recently taken shape. For much of the Middle Ages, both regions faced invasions by Germanic tribes (sometimes called the barbarians) from northern and central Europe. When those invasions ended, monarchs in England and France worked diligently to consolidate their power, between the twelfth century and the fifteenth century, which in turn led them to consider New World exploration and colonization. However, they lagged behind the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch because of the almost constant state of war between the two countries as well as the emergence of the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century.

### 2.4.1 England and France at War

During the reign of Henry II of England (r. 1154-1189) and Phillip II of France (r. 1180-1223), the history of England and France became closely

linked. The two countries fought for control over Normandy, a region in northern France directly across the channel from England. Henry's son, John, lost control of the province in 1204.<sup>17</sup> For the remainder of his reign, John tried to regain the lost territory. His actions upset the English nobility, who objected to his less-than-scrupulous means to finance the war, which included raising court fees and inheritance taxes beyond what most people could pay and selling government appointments. Several northern barons led a rebellion against the king that quickly spread to the rest of the country. In 1215, after several months of negotiations, John agreed to address the nobility's demands. The resulting Magna Carta tackled specific grievances and suggested that all English citizens, including the king, lived under the rule of law. Future generations of Englishmen based their concept of justice and liberty on the principles of the Magna Carta.<sup>18</sup> Political differences between England and France continued through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries at a time when Europe also faced famine and disease.

While the Black Death (the plague) ravaged Europe in the fourteenth century, England and France descended into the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) which was fought over who would succeed the childless Charles IV of France after he died in 1328. The lengthy war had a significant political impact for both sides. In England, it strengthened Parliament's role. Edward III (r. 1312-1377) and his successors had to call Parliament into session more frequently to raise funds to fight the French. As these meetings occurred, the House of Lords and the House of Commons began to take shape. After the war, the English began to see a representative government as the most enlightened form of government in the world. A corresponding national assembly did not appear in France because Phillip VI (r. 1328-1350) and his successors considered it repugnant. While the French people began to form a common identity because of the war, the nation's regional assemblies did not want to give up their power. Therefore, the French built their national government on a strong monarchy.<sup>19</sup>

The Hundred Years' War also brought on a period of domestic strife in England as the Duke of York and the Duke of Lancaster fought to control the young Henry VI who ascended to the throne in 1422. The War of the Roses finally ended when Henry Tudor defeated his rival in 1485. In the Tudor dynasty, the monarchy became the main political force in England. Henry VII (r. 1485-1508) preferred to rely on a royal council composed mostly of men from the middle class instead of on Parliament. He used diplomacy, not war, to smooth over problems with other nations. Therefore, he did not have to call Parliament into session to secure funds for his ventures. His actions undercut the influence of the English aristocracy. Henry VII's governing council also dealt with recalcitrant nobles by using the Star Chamber, which was a judicial body that undermined traditions of English common law, and



by promoting the interests of the middle class. In the Tudor dynasty, the monarchy became the main political force in England.<sup>20</sup>

During Henry VII's reign, England made its first foray into overseas exploration. In May 1497, the king allowed John Cabot, a Venetian mariner living in London, to sail under the English flag in an attempt to find a northern route to Asia. Cabot reached land, what he called Newfoundland, in June and claimed it on behalf of Henry VII. He made a second voyage in 1498, funded in part by the king because he expected to reap the financial rewards of the journey. However, after Cabot's death, his crew, led by his son Sebastian, failed to find any precious metals, so Henry VII lost interest in overseas exploration. Though Spain and Portugal began the process of colonization, England found itself in the midst of a political and a religious crisis for much of the sixteenth century. Events at home took precedence over any further state-sponsored oceanic voyages. However, Cabot's voyages gave England claim to the North American mainland when the English began to think about colonization in the New World.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.4.2 Religion and Politics in the Sixteenth Century

Throughout most of the medieval period, secular leaders in England and France had relied on a connection to the Roman Catholic Church to underscore their legitimacy. By the early sixteenth century, however, the church had come under fire. The intellectual currents of the Renaissance played a role in this change, but so too did the practices of the church, including clerical immorality, clerical ignorance, and clerical absenteeism. The church's failings led Martin Luther to touch off the Protestant Reformation in 1517. Luther, a Catholic priest in Germany, hoped to prompt a reform movement within the church when he posted his theses on Wittenberg's church door. In his early years, Luther struggled to grapple with the church's teachings about salvation, especially the idea that by doing good works, or purchasing *indulgences*, people could earn their salvation. In an effort to force the church to clarify its teachings on salvation, Luther wrote the ninety-five theses. He also called into question the authority of the pope. Church authorities subsequently sent Luther a letter giving him two months to recant his statements. Luther burned the letter, thus assuring his excommunication from the church. In spite of the church's hope that excommunication would quell the unrest, Protestant sects appeared throughout Europe, including in England and France. The decision to become Protestant or remain Catholic in many cases had as much to do with politics as it did with faith.<sup>22</sup>

The English Reformation began officially when Henry VIII (r. 1509-1549) asked Pope Clement VII to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. To marry Catherine, his dead brother's wife, Henry had had to secure a

special dispensation from Pope Julius. During the course of their marriage, Catherine had six children, but only one survived, a daughter named Mary. Henry convinced himself that marrying his brother's wife prevented him from having a male heir. Henry VIII's request put Clement in a bad situation because reversing Julius's decision would suggest papal fallibility. At a time when the church was already under fire from the Protestants, such a move would further weaken it. Moreover, Catherine's nephew, Charles V of Spain, had recently taken control of Rome, the papal seat of power.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Clement refused Henry's request. However, Thomas Cranmer, appointed the archbishop of Canterbury in 1532, harbored Protestant sympathies. He therefore granted the annulment in spite of the pope's previous decision. In 1533, Henry VIII married Anne Boleyn; their daughter, Elizabeth, was born the same year. When that marriage failed to produce a male heir, Henry tried again with Jane Seymour. She gave birth to Edward, in 1537. After Jane died in childbirth, Henry went on to have three more wives but no more children. Meanwhile, Parliament passed a series of succession acts, which made Edward the rightful heir followed by his older sisters, Mary and Elizabeth.<sup>24</sup>

While Henry VIII's quest to produce a male heir played out, he also moved to separate England from the Roman Catholic Church. Relying on the advice of Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell, Henry decided to break with the pope, a decision leading Parliament to pass the Act in Restraint of Appeals and the Act of Submission of the Clergy. The first measure made the king the head of the Church of England. The second measure required all priests in England to swear allegiance to the king's church. Doctrinally speaking, the Church of England, called the Anglican Church, made few changes. However, Henry VIII dissolved all the monasteries in England and confiscated their wealth as a means to build his treasury.<sup>25</sup>

The fate of Protestantism ebbed and flowed under Henry's children, Edward VI (r. 1547-1553), Mary I (r. 1553-1558), and Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603). Edward was strongly Protestant and wanted to make significant changes that would mirror the religious changes on the continent. Mary, on the other hand, was strongly Catholic. She pushed Parliament to repeal the legislation that created the Church of England, and she executed several hundred Protestants. When Elizabeth succeeded Mary, she sought to achieve a balance between the Protestants and Catholics in England. Her policies leaned toward Protestantism, but she asked only for outward conformity from her subjects. The Church of England retained the ceremony of the Catholic service, but the priests said mass in the vernacular and could marry.<sup>26</sup> Her compromises brought a certain amount of stability to the country. They also led to the rise of the Puritans in England who would play an instrumental role in English colonization in the New World in the seventeenth century.

The French monarchy had little political reason to turn to Protestantism in the early sixteenth century. In 1516, Francis I (r. 1515-1547) and Pope Leo X signed the Concordat of Bologna. It made Catholicism the official religion of France but also gave the French king the right to appoint church authorities in his country. Unlike Henry VIII, Francis I did not need to break with Rome to exert his control over the church or its financial resources. In fact, given the religious stability in the 1520s, Francis looked for possible ways to catch up with the Spanish in the realm of overseas exploration and colonization. In 1524, he sponsored a voyage by Giovanni da Verrazzano to stake a claim in the New World and discover the Northwest Passage. During his voyage, Verrazano explored the Atlantic coastline from modern-day South Carolina to New York. A decade later, Francis sponsored two voyages by Jacques Cartier. While he failed to find a northern route to Asia, Cartier surveyed the St. Lawrence River and made valuable contacts with the native population. Nevertheless, the discoveries did not inspire Francis to support a permanent settlement in Canada at that time.<sup>27</sup>

The connection between the state and the church established in 1516, however, did not prevent Protestant sentiments from growing in France during the tenure of Henry II (r. 1547-1559). The weakness of Henry II's sons led to a civil war in France that had religious undertones. Some members of the French nobility became Protestants in order to show their independence from the crown. The Catholic-Protestant split in France led to a series of religious riots, the worst of which occurred on St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, 1572. Shortly after the marriage of Margaret of Valois to Henry of Navarre, Catholics led by Henry of Guise viciously attacked Protestants in Paris. After the so-called [Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre](#), three factions vied for control during the War of the Three Henrys—Henry III, Henry of Guise, and Henry of Navarre. A group of Catholic moderates finally ended the strife when they concluded that domestic tranquility was more important than religious doctrine. Moreover, the deaths of two of the Henrys left only the Protestant Henry of Navarre standing. After he ascended to the throne, Henry IV (r. 1589-1610) joined the Roman Catholic Church. Then, he issued the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which granted French Protestants, the Huguenots, the liberty of conscience and the liberty of worship. Henry IV's tentative nod to religious toleration brought stability to the country. Relative peace at home paved the way for future French exploration.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.4.3 Before You Move On...

#### Key Concepts

During the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era, England and France took shape as nation states. When the barbarian invasions stopped in the twelfth century, English and French rulers sought to consolidate their control. While they managed to exert greater influence over their subjects, they also found themselves frequently at odds with one another and facing religious strife at home as the Protestant Reformation took hold in Europe. By the late sixteenth century, England and France, both of which had only flirted with overseas exploration to that point, had become sovereign states under the rule of strong monarchies. Thus, as the new century dawned, both seemed poised to start their colonial ventures and carry their rivalry to the New World.

#### Test Yourself

1. The principle implied in the Magna Carta (1215) was
  - a. that democracy would replace monarchy.
  - b. that the king was above the law.
  - c. that the people ruled the monarch.
  - d. that all people, even the king, were subject to the law.
  
2. Henry VIII's religious reformation in England occurred
  - a. mostly for political reasons.
  - b. strictly for economic reasons.
  - c. mostly for diplomatic reasons.
  - d. strictly for religious reasons.

[Click here to see answers](#)

## 2.5 AFRICA AT THE OUTSET OF THE AGE OF DISCOVERY AND THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Africa takes a central role in any discussion of increasing globalization during the Age of Discovery. First, emerging European explorations and global trade networks began with European contact with and exploration of Africa. Early Portuguese exploration started trade networks in gold, ivory, and slaves that invigorated the European economy. Later, trade expanded to incorporate the Americas, transforming into the Triangle Trade that

encompassed the Trans-Atlantic slave trade network. In many ways, contact and trade with Africa created the Atlantic World, the network of connections that linked the Americas, Europe, and Africa economically, politically, culturally, religiously, and environmentally. The transformations of the Age of Discovery began in Africa.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Africa was a continent of tremendous diversity and home to hundreds of cultures, languages, and political states. Different regions in Africa experienced the changes of the era in different ways. Western and Central Africa were greatly influenced by the changes wrought by the slave trade. Southern Africa was the first region to experience the phenomenon of European migration when the Dutch established Cape Colony in 1652. Northern and eastern Africa had been linked to the wider world through trade networks such as the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, as well as through the spread of Islam and Christianity. However, the expansion of Europe through trade and political networks contested African control over their territory and European participation in the Indian Ocean trade.

### **2.5.1 Medieval West Africa: The Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay**

In the mid-fifteenth century, European countries like Portugal and Spain sought an all-water route to the cultures of the Indian Ocean in order to enjoy their spices, silks, and cottons without having to pay the exorbitant rates of the Arab traders who controlled the overland routes; these routes began in Indonesia and wound their way along the coasts of southeast Asia and India and then up either the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea toward the eastern Mediterranean. Monarchs like Prince Henry the Navigator sponsored fleets along the western coast of Africa, rounding the Cape of Good Hope and sailing northward toward the Indian Ocean. Africa was not, however, just a way station on the route to the Indian Ocean; the continent was invaluable for the goods it contributed to world trade: ivory, tortoise shells, dried coconut, animal skins, cowrie shells, and porcelain from East Africa and from West and South Africa, gold, palm oil, and slaves.<sup>29</sup>

In the centuries before the Age of Discovery, Africa saw the rise to preeminence of a number of impressive kingdoms: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay in the west, the city states of the East African coast, and in the south, Great Zimbabwe. Located in West Africa, Ghana was inhabited by the Soninke people whose rulers were called “Ghana.” Most of the territory called Wagadou by the Soninke was non-arable and thus unfit for agriculture. It was only the southern region that enjoyed measurable rainfall that enabled the growth of crops abundant enough to support a population of around

200,000. Ghana's monarchy was not unlike those of Europe during the same century. The king held all power, religious, judicial, military, and political, although unlike European monarchies, the crown was passed matrilineally through the eldest sister of the ruling monarch.

Much of what we know about Ghana comes from Al-Bakri, an eleventh century Spanish Muslim geographer whose *Book of Highways and Kingdoms* details the workings of the country. The king and his advisors were non-Muslims who practiced the animist religion of their ancestors, though by 1000 CE there was a large Muslim population, and many of the Ghana's advisors were Islamic.<sup>30</sup> Al-Bakri explains that the capital city of Ghana, Koumbi Saleh, consisted of "two towns lying on a plain." One of these cities was inhabited by Muslims and "possessed" twelve mosques, while the other, six miles from the Muslim town, was the "residence of the King;" it consisted of a "palace and a number of dome-shaped dwellings, all of them surrounded by a strong enclosure, like a city wall." The city also contained one mosque for "the convenience of those Muslims who came on diplomatic missions." In the judicial matters, over which the king presided, trial was by ordeal, not unlike the technique used by medieval European kings. As was also true of medieval European kingdoms, the monarch controlled all trade, and the social hierarchy placed the king, his court and Muslim administrators on the top rung, followed by a merchant class, and below them farmers, herders, and artisans. There is no doubt as to the wealth of the rulers of Ghana, as al-Bakri wrote: "When [the king] holds court...he sits in a pavilion around which stand ten horses wearing golden trappings; at his right are the sons of the chiefs of the country, splendidly dressed and with their hair sprinkled with gold."<sup>31</sup>

By 1200, the kingdom of Ghana was in decline as political disintegration saw the rise of several petty kingdoms led by warlords. Eventually one people, the Mandinka, asserted themselves over the others and created a new kingdom, Mali, built on the foundations of Ghana. Historians usually point out that the strength of Mali lay in part in the accession to the throne of two powerful leaders: Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa. It was through the efforts and resourcefulness of these two men that a strong, vibrant kingdom was created.



**Figure 2.4 Great Friday Mosque at Jenne** | Mansa Musa established control over Jenne, and upon his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca, he brought an Egyptian architect by the name of al-Saheli whom Mansa Musa paid to create mosques at several cities; the Friday Prayers Mosque was one of these. Mansa Musa also built a royal palace (or Madugu) in Timbuktu. The mosque was completed in the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century.

**Author:** United States Department of Agriculture  
**Source:** USDA.gov



The founder of Mali, Sundiata Keita (1230-1255), ruled over an empire that was larger, more agriculturally successful, and wealthier than Ghana. Technically, Mali was an Islamic state, though its religious practices mixed Islam and the more traditional African ceremonies; although the leaders participated in the pilgrimage and ritual prayers, they also followed ancient pagan practices of eating unclean meat, drinking strong beverages, self-abasement before the ruler, and “scanty female clothing.”<sup>32</sup> Sundiata chose Niani as the capital of his empire and before his death had turned the city into an important trading center and had expanded his empire to include the trading cities of Gao, Jenne, and Walata.

The expansion of the empire of Mali continued under Sundiata’s descendent, Mansa Musa (r. 1312-1337); *mansa* means emperor in the language of the Mandinka) to include Timbuktu and territory westward to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. The empire Mansa Musa created was twice the size of Ghana and contained about 8,000,000 people. Mansa Musa was different from Sundiata in that he became a devout Muslim, though the majority of his subjects did not. Musa is perhaps best known for his fourteenth century pilgrimage to Mecca (1324-1325) on which he was accompanied by 500 slaves each carrying a six-pound staff of pure gold and 100 elephants bearing 100 pounds of gold.<sup>33</sup> He stopped in Egypt for three months before moving on to Mecca and Medina, during which his visit was recorded by al-Omari, the Egyptian sultan’s scribe:

This man, Mansa Musa, spread upon Cairo the flood of his generosity: there was not person, officer of the court or holder of any office of the Sultanate [of Egypt] who did not receive a sum of gold from him. The people of Cairo earned incalculable sums from him, whether by buying and selling or by gifts.<sup>34</sup>

During Mansa Musa’s reign, Timbuktu became a center of international trade and education. The king brought Arab scholars to the city, as well as architects, astronomers, poets, lawyers, mathematicians, and theologians. Over one hundred schools and eighteen universities were established (for men only, of course) for Islamic studies.

The Muslim geographer, Ibn Battuta, visited Mali during the despotic reign of Mansa Musa’s unpopular brother, Mansa Sulayman, remarking that in Mali there was “complete security in the land” as the *mansa* “shows no mercy to anyone guilty of the least act of [violence].” The inhabitants were pious Muslims:

Another of their good qualities is their habit of wearing clean white garments on Fridays. Even if a man has nothing but an old worn shirt, he washes it and cleans it, and wears it to the Friday service. Yet another is their zeal for learning the Koran by heart. They put their children in chains

if they show any backwardness in memorizing it, and they are not set free until they have it by heart. I visited [the emperor] in his house on the day of the festival. His children were chained up, so I said to him, 'Will you not let them loose?' He replied, 'I shall not do so until they learn the Koran by heart.'<sup>35</sup>

He remarks, however, that the practice of nakedness persisted among the women, which he, as a devout Muslim, looked upon with dismay:

Among their bad qualities [is] the following: The women servants, slave-girls, and young girls go about in front of everyone naked, without a stitch of clothing on them. Women go into the sultan's presence naked and without coverings, and his daughters also go about naked.<sup>36</sup>

As was true of other empires in history, the empire of Mali was dependent on the strength and success of the *mansa*. When Mansa Musa died, he was followed by his unpopular and despotic brother, who was in turn followed by a series of weak rulers whose reigns were short-lived. During this period, the provinces began to break away and slowly the Mali Empire disintegrated; it was followed in the mid-fourteenth century by the third great empire of West Africa: the Songhay.

The empire of the Songhay people took in the territories that had been controlled by Ghana and Mali and extended them east and north to become one of the largest empires in African history. Basing their military success on armies of mounted horsemen, the Songhay warriors took one Mali city after another until by the mid-fifteenth century they controlled the important cities of Timbuktu and Jenna. As was true in Mali, the sources of income came from tribute, the royal farms, and tariffs on trade. The exports in greatest demand were similar to those of Mali: gold, ivory, and slaves. Politically, Songhay was more centralized than Mali, and with every territory taken, the local kings or chieftains were removed and replaced by governors appointed by the emperors. A young traveler calling himself "Leo Africanus" gave his readers an idea as to the wealth of one of the local governors, who had "many articles of gold and [keeps] a magnificent and well-furnished court. When he travels anywhere he rides upon a camel which is led by some of his noblemen...Attending him he has always three thousand horsemen, and a great number of footmen armed with poisoned arrows." Though generally, while the ruling classes were very wealthy, the majority of the citizens were "very poor."<sup>37</sup>

### 2.5.2 East and South Africa

By the mid-fifteenth century, the east African coast was dotted with city states which have left no written records of their history and society. The city states had served as trading depots as early as the fifth century, and after the death of Mohammed and the spread of Islam across North Africa, Arab traders established small cities, whose local peoples (called the “Zanj” by the Arabs) were ruled by local kings and practiced ancient animistic religions. As the centuries progressed, more and more Arabs and Indonesians settled along the coast, creating a culture called “Swahili.” By the early fourteenth century, Kilwa had become the most important city in the region, whose culture was described in great detail by Ibn Battuta:

[Kilwa] is a large city on the seacoast, most of whose inhabitants are Zinj [sic], jet black in colour. They have tattoo marks on their faces. Kilwa is a very fine and substantially built town, and all its buildings are of wood. Its inhabitants are constantly engaged in military expeditions, for their country is contiguous to the heathen Zanj. The sultan at the time of my visit was Abu'l-Muzaffar Hasan, who was noted for his gifts and generosity. He used to devote the fifth part of the booty made on his expeditions to pious and charitable purposes, as is prescribed in the Koran, and I have seen him give the clothes off his back to a mendicant who asked him for them.<sup>38</sup>

When the Portuguese made it around the Cape of Good Hope in the late fifteenth century and encountered the East African coastal societies, they were amazed at the wealth of these cities. Some of the cities created manufactures for export, while others focused on natural products like leopard skins, tortoise shell, ivory, and gold, as well as slaves.

Until the late nineteenth century, the society of South Africa known as Great Zimbabwe was unknown to the European world; in 1867 a German explorer named Adam Renders came across ruins that archaeologists consider the most impressive ruins south of the Nile Valley: Great Zimbabwe. The city was the capital of a vast empire stretching across South Africa by the first century CE; it continued to thrive as a gold producing area until the fifteenth century, when due to soil exhaustion it was unable to support its large population.

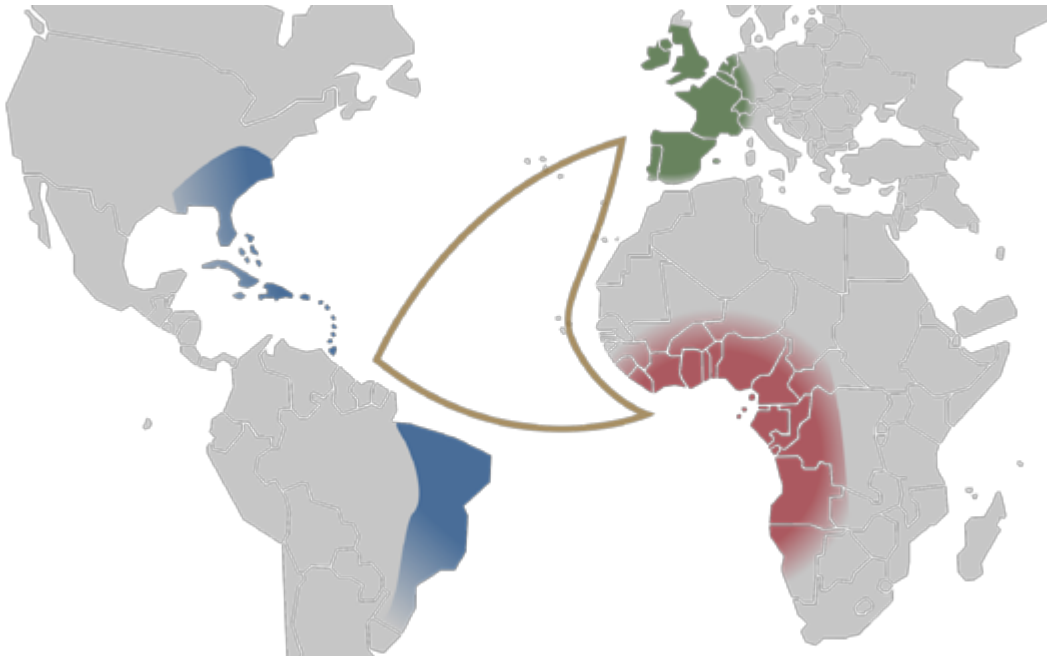
### 2.5.3 The Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Portuguese first traded for African slaves in 1441. They did not create the slave trade; Africans had held slaves and traded them long before the Europeans entered the market. African peoples throughout West Africa took captives in warfare and kept slaves as a means of incorporating foreigners into the society. African slavery therefore differed greatly from the European

norms of slavery that became established in the New World. For instance, slaves in Africa were not property; they retained some rights as a person and as an individual. The condition of slavery was not inherited; if a slave had children, then the children were born free. Moreover, the condition of slavery might not last an entire lifetime but instead a period of years.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade emerged with the colonization of the New World. As the need for labor grew, so too did the trade. At first, some Europeans tried to use force in acquiring slaves, but this method proved impracticable on any scale. The only workable method was acquiring slaves through trade with Africans, since they controlled all trade into the interior. Typically, Europeans were restricted to trading posts, or *feitorias*, along the coast. Captives were brought to the *feitorias*, where they were processed as cargo rather than as human beings. Slaves were kept imprisoned in small, crowded rooms, segregated by sex and age, and “fatted up” if they were deemed too small for transport. They were branded to show what merchant purchased them, that taxes had been paid, and even that they had been baptized as a Christian. The high mortality rate of the slave trade began on the forced march to the *feitorias* and in a slave’s imprisonment within them; the mortality rate continued to climb during the second part of the journey, the Middle Passage.

The Middle Passage, the voyage across the Atlantic from Africa to the Americas, comprised the middle leg of the Atlantic Triangle Trade network,



**Figure 2.5 Atlantic Triangle Trade** | The Triangle Trade linked Europe, Africa, and the Americas as part of a greater Atlantic World.

Author: Jon Chui  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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which traded manufactured goods such as beads, mirrors, cloth, and firearms to Africa for slaves. Slaves were then carried to the Americas, where their labor would produce items of the last leg of the Triangle Trade such as sugar, rum, molasses, indigo, cotton, and rice, to name a few. The Middle Passage itself was a hellish experience. Slaves were segregated by sex, often stripped naked, chained together, and kept in extremely tight quarters for up to twenty-three hours a day; as many as 12-13 percent died during this dehumanizing experience. Although we will likely never know the exact number of people who were enslaved and brought to the Americas, the number is certainly larger than ten million.<sup>39</sup>

#### **2.5.4 The Kingdom of Dahomey**

The Age of Discovery brought many changes to West Africa. In some areas, the slave trade had the effect of breaking down societies. For instance, in the early nineteenth century the great Yoruba confederation of states began to break down due to civil wars. Conflicts escalated as participants sold slaves to acquire European weapons; these weapons were then used to acquire more slaves, thus creating a vicious cycle. Other groups grew and gained power because of their role in the slave trade, perhaps the most prominent being the West African kingdom of Dahomey.

The Kingdom of Dahomey was established in the 1720s. Dahomey was built on the slave trade; kings used profits from the slave trade to acquire guns, which in turn were used to expand their kingdom by conquest and incorporation of smaller kingdoms. Most slaves were acquired either by trade with the interior or by raids into the north and west into Nigeria; Dahomey took advantage of the civil wars among the Yoruba to gain access to a ready source of captives.

European trade agents were kept isolated in the main trade port of Whydah. Only a privileged few were allowed into the interior of the kingdom to have an audience with the king; as a result, only a few contemporary sources describe the kingdom. Like his European counterparts, the king of Dahomey was an absolute monarch, possessing great power in a highly centralized state. All trade with Europeans was a royal monopoly, jealously guarded by the kings. The monarchs never allowed Europeans to deal directly with the people of the kingdom, keeping all profits for the state, and allowing this highly militarized state to grow and expand.

## 2.5.5 Before You Move On...

### Key Concepts

On the eve of the sixteenth century, Africa was a continent of tremendous diversity and home to hundreds of cultures, languages, and political states. Most of the empires of the past two centuries were in decline, though the demand for their goods continued and the city states of East Africa were viable trading depots. The trans-Saharan trade routes, in place since the earliest years of the Common Era, still linked East Africa, West Africa, and the Islamic sultanates in the North. It is not surprising, however, that the various regions in Africa experienced the changes brought by the Age of Discovery in different ways. Western and Central Africa were greatly influenced by the slave trade. The Kingdom of Dahomey provides an example of one of the ways that African groups were influenced by and participated in both the Age of Discovery and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the middle portion of the Atlantic Triangle Trade network. At least ten million Africans were enslaved and forced to make the Middle Passage across the Atlantic to the New World. Mortality rates for the Middle Passage averaged around 12-13 percent.

### Test Yourself

1. The region of Africa most directly involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was
  - a. North Africa
  - b. West Africa
  - c. South Africa
  - d. East Africa
2. True/False: The Middle Passage was a part of the Indian Ocean trade network.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. Which of the following empires was not in West Africa?
  - a. Great Zimbabwe
  - b. Ghana
  - c. Mali
  - d. Songhay



4. Much of what we know about the cultures of East Africa comes from the writings of:
  - a. Leo Africanus
  - b. Sundiata Keita
  - c. Mansa Musa
  - d. Ibn Battuta
  
5. The empire of Mali was created by which of the following?
  - a. Mansa Musa
  - b. Sundiata Kieta
  - c. Mansa Suleyman
  - d. Leo Africanus
  
6. The Kingdom of Dahomey controlled the slave trade in their region by
  - a. refusing to trade with anyone but the Dutch.
  - b. keeping Europeans confined to the port at Whydah.
  - c. making European merchants trade with only the king and no others.
  - d. B and C.
  - e. all of the above.

[Click here to see answers](#)

## 2.6 Conclusion

The period before contact with the Americas marked the beginning of globalization. During this era, the world grew ever more interconnected through trade, politics, culture, and religion. In China, the rise of the Ming Dynasty in 1439 began a new era. Under the Ming Dynasty, the Forbidden City, the seat of Chinese rule in the following centuries and a lasting symbol of Chinese power, was built. The Chinese were the first to undertake substantial oceanic voyages in the Age of Discovery. Zheng He's massive fleet dwarfed European expeditions of the period, both in the numbers and size of the ships. The armada explored much of the Indian Ocean region as far as Africa, mapping, charting, trading, and incorporating a great part of the region into a Chinese tributary system. Although a few historians have suggested that Zheng He's fleet voyaged as far as Australia and the Americas, compelling documentary evidence for this is lacking.

In Europe, under the sponsorship of Prince Henry the Navigator, Portugal emerged as one of the leaders of the European Age of Discovery, in part because of technologies such as the compass, the astrolabe, and the *caravel*. The Portuguese established trading ports along the coast of West Africa as well as in India. After Columbus's 1492 voyage, the Spanish found themselves exploring vast new lands. Competition between Portugal and Spain was alleviated with the Treaty of Tordesillas and the Treaty of Zaragoza. These two agreements effectively divided the earth into two zones of influence. Meanwhile, England and France took shape as nation states, seeking to exert greater influence over their subjects. By the 1500s, England and France were sovereign states characterized by strong monarchies. These developments helped to pave the way for their overseas expansion in the seventeenth century; however, they had to deal with internal schisms caused by the Protestant Reformation before they could devote their attention to catching up with Portugal and Spain.

On the eve of the sixteenth century, Africa was a continent of tremendous diversity and home to hundreds of cultures, languages, and political states. In the centuries before the Age of Discovery, Africa saw the rise to pre-eminence of a number of impressive kingdoms: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay in the west, the city states of the East African coast, and in the south, Great Zimbabwe. Different regions in Africa experienced the changes of the era in different ways. Western and Central Africa were greatly influenced by the changes wrought by the slave trade. The Kingdom of Dahomey provides an example of one of the ways that African groups were influenced by and participated in both the Age of Discovery and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the middle portion of the Atlantic

Triangle Trade network. At least ten million Africans were enslaved and forced to make the Middle Passage across the Atlantic to the New World. Mortality rates for the Middle Passage averaged around 12-13 percent.

Voyages of exploration captured the immensity of the earth in maps and images and created webs of connection between regions and peoples, bringing the world closer together. It is for these reasons that this period is often referred to as the Early Modern Era. For the first time, we see the emergence of a world that bears great similarity to ours of the twenty-first century, a world interconnected through trade, politics, culture, and religion.

## 2.7 CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

- How might the Age of Discovery have been fundamentally changed if the Chinese had not abandoned their voyages of trade and exploration under Zheng He? Why, in your estimation, did Yung Lo's successor Zhu Zhanji decide to end the voyages in 1433?
- How did trade and the economy shape how each group or nation participated in the Age of Discovery? What are some other factors that shaped participation? Did religion or economy play a greater role in determining the actions of a nation during the Age of Discovery?
- Why do we know so little about the medieval empires of Africa? What sources do we depend on to instruct us in their history?

## 2.8 KEY TERMS

- *Caravel*
- Christopher Columbus
- Common law
- Edict of Nantes
- Kingdom of Ghana
- Great Zimbabwe
- Hong Wu
- Hundred Years' War
- Ibn Battuta
- Kingdom of Dahomey
- Magna Carta
- Kingdom of Mali
- Mansa Musa
- Martin Luther
- Middle Passage
- Prince Henry the Navigator
- Protestant Reformation
- Songhay
- Sundiata Kieta
- Timbuktu
- Spice Islands
- Strait of Malacca
- The Tudors
- Treaty of Tordesillas
- Treaty of Zaragoza
- Triangle Trade
- Yung Lo
- Zanj
- Zheng He

## 2.9 CHRONOLOGY

The following chronology is a list of important dates and events associated with this chapter.

Date	Event
642-800	Muslim conquest of Egypt and North Africa
650-1500	Slave trade from sub-Saharan Africa to Mediterranean
900-1100	Kingdom of Ghana created and flourished
1100-1400	Great Zimbabwe built and flourished
1154	Henry II became King of England, launching the Angevin dynasty
1180	Phillip II became the King of France and then expanded Capetian control over the continent
1194	Phillip II of France and Richard I of England began a war over Normandy
1215	King John of England accepted the Magna Carta
1250	End of Portuguese <i>Reconquista</i>
1300	Kilwa becomes the most power city state in East Africa
1312-1337	Reign of Mansa Musa in Mali
1324-1325	Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca
1337	Hundred Years' War between England and France broke out
1348	The Black Death (the Plague) spread across Europe
1369	Chinese defeated the Mongols and founded the Ming dynasty
1405-1433	Zheng He's seven voyages into the Indian Ocean region
1453	Wars of the Roses began in England
1485	Henry VII became King of England, ending the Wars of the Roses and launching the Tudor dynasty
1487	Bartolomeu Dias rounded Cape of Good Hope

Date	Event
1492	Columbus began his first voyage; Spanish <i>Reconquista</i> ended; Muslims and Jew expelled from Spain
1494	Treaty of Tordesillas signed
c. 1500	The travels of Leo Africanus
1510	Leo Africanus reached Great Zimbabwe
1511	Portuguese conquest of Strait of Malacca
1516	Francis I of France and Pope Leo X signed the Concordat of Bologna
1517	Martin Luther launched a protest against the Roman Catholic Church which led to the Protestant Reformation
1525	Magellan's fleet returned after successfully circumnavigating the globe
1527	Henry VIII, seeking to divorce Catherine of Aragon, touched off the Protestant Reformation in England
1529	Treaty of Zaragoza signed
1558	Elizabeth I became the Queen of England
1572	Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre led to the War of the Three Henrys
1598	Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes, which granted the Huguenots the liberty of conscience and the liberty of worship

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## ANSWER KEY FOR CHAPTER TWO: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT: ASIA, EUROPE, AND AFRICA IN THE EARLY MODERN ERA

Check your answers to the questions in the Before You Move On Sections for this chapter. You can click on the questions to take you back to the chapter section.

Correct answers are **BOLDED**

### Section 2.2.3 - p. 36

- What important event(s) took place in 1492?
  - Columbus's first voyage to the New World
  - the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims from Spain
  - the end of the Reconquista
  - D. ALL OF THE ABOVE**
  - A and C
- The \_\_\_\_\_ enabled the Portuguese to enter the spice trade.
  - rounding the Cape of Good Hope
  - B. THE CONQUEST OF MALACCA**
  - the discovery of the New World
  - making contact with Prester John
  - the conquest of Goa
- True/False: For the Spanish, reconquering the Iberian Peninsula was a military and religious action.
  - A. TRUE**
  - False
- The mythical king Prester John was important to the Portuguese because
  - he controlled the spice trade
  - he would be an ally to the Spanish in reconquering the Iberian Peninsula
  - C. HE WAS A CHRISTIAN KING IN AN AREA DOMINATED BY MUSLIMS**
  - he could direct them in how to cross the Indian Ocean
- The Treaty of Tordesillas and the \_\_\_\_\_ worked in tandem to establish zones of influence for Portuguese and Spanish trade.
  - Treaty of Nanking
  - Treaty of Molucca
  - C. TREATY OF ZARAGOZA**
  - Treaty of Goa

### Section 2.3.1 - p. 41

- Zheng He's goals for exploring the Indian Ocean included
  - exploring and mapping the region.
  - establishing trade with port cities.
  - incorporating new areas into the Chinese tribute system.
  - D. ALL OF THE ABOVE.**
  - none of the above.
- One possible reason for Zhu Zhanji's decision to end the voyages of Zheng He was
  - a spirit of isolationism in the Chinese court under Zhu Zhanji.
  - to save money and avoid the expense of the voyages.
  - to end competition with the French, who were entering the Indian Ocean trade.
  - D. A AND B.**
  - all of the above.

**Section 2.4.3 - p. 46**

1. The principle implied in the Magna Carta (1215) was
  - a. that democracy would replace monarchy.
  - b. that the king was above the law.
  - c. that the people ruled the monarch.
  - D. THAT ALL PEOPLE, EVEN THE KING, WERE SUBJECT TO THE LAW.**
2. Henry VIII's religious reformation in England occurred
  - A. MOSTLY FOR POLITICAL REASONS.**
  - b. strictly for economic reasons.
  - c. mostly for diplomatic reasons.
  - d. strictly for religious reasons.

**Section 2.5.5 - p. 54**

1. The region of Africa most directly involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was
  - a. North Africa
  - B. WEST AFRICA**
  - c. South Africa
  - d. East Africa
2. True/False: The Middle Passage was a part of the Indian Ocean trade network.
  - a. True
  - B. FALSE**
3. Which of the following empires was not in West Africa?
  - A. GREAT ZIMBABWE**
  - b. Ghana
  - c. Mali
  - d. Songhay
4. Much of what we know about the cultures of East Africa comes from the writings of:
  - a. Leo Africanus
  - b. Sundiata Keita
  - c. Mansa Musa
  - D. IBN BATTUTA**
5. The empire of Mali was created by which of the following?
  - a. Mansa Musa
  - B. SUNDIATA KIETA**
  - c. Mansa Suleyman
  - d. Leo Africanus
6. The Kingdom of Dahomey controlled the slave trade in their region by
  - a. refusing to trade with anyone but the Dutch.
  - b. keeping Europeans confined to the port at Whydah.
  - c. making European merchants trade with only the king and no others.
  - D. B AND C.**
  - e. all of the above.