

AS THE WORLD TURNS: 1300-1500 AD

Overview

The Ancient Era there was a period of great development: language, religion, technology, cities, empires, governments, social structures... The foundations for all we know and do today trace back to this earliest era of history.

The Medieval Era was a time of transformation. Around the world, societies experienced a mutual metamorphosis; shedding off the structures of the ancient era and laying the foundations of our modern times. This can be best summarized in the following changes:

- The collapse of major empires in the West & East (*Western Roman Empire & Han Dynasty*) and their subsequent restructuring into the more familiar cultural and political units (*Spain, France, England, etc*)
- The development of the Feudal System in Europe and Japan. This was a unique mixture of oppression and violence along with protection and stability.
- The creation of new mega-empires, formed by the highly mobile nomadic herders (Arab-Muslims, Mongols), along with new areas developing their first kingdoms (*W. Africa, Central/South America*). These new kingdoms and empires prompted a resurgence of trade throughout Africa & Asia as well as major scientific developments in Arabia, India and China.
- The consolidation of belief systems. Many of the ancient “pagan” religions of the nomads and early settlers giving way to the “major” religions of Christianity, Buddhism, and the newly created Islam. While these major religions unified large numbers of people, schisms developed over who should be in charge and differences in theological beliefs. The rapid expansion and competition between the religions, plus the schisms within each major religion, began to cause violent confrontations.

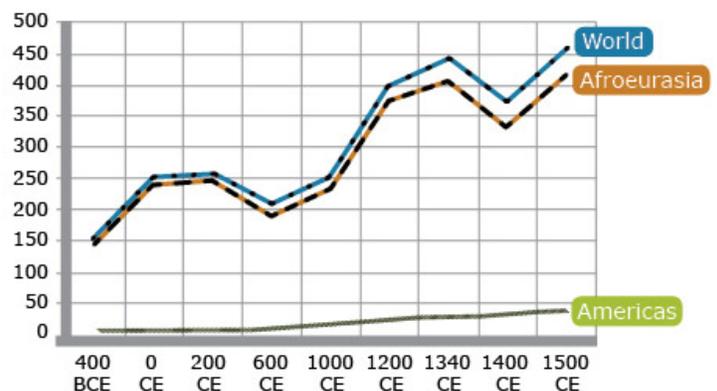


Initially, every major region of the world saw an population and cultural decline. By 1300, every area except Europe grew well past where they had been in Ancient times. Many areas become significantly more advanced then in Ancient times.

Much of this success was due to a second agricultural revolution developed in Europe and the Middle East. Rotating crops using the three field system kept the soil from “dying.” Meanwhile, crops were being introduced/shared in different parts of Europe and Asia. Combined with better agricultural tools to develop the land, these changes allowed for more food to be grown per acre and for a more nutritious diet.

Population Overview: 1300-1500

Moving into the 1300-1500s, population was on the rise. As the chart shows, the worlds population was reaching ~ 450 million people... with 95% of them living in Afroeurasia (Africa, Europe, Asia). The Americas were drastically lagging behind in population and influence. They had been the last continents to have humans arrive and did not have the domestic plants and animals naturally to develop into major empires. This caused them to develop much more slowly. Add into the mix, that the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans were natural barriers, isolating the Americas from everyone else. While this protected them from the frequent violence in Afroeurasia, it also disconnected them from the intellectual and technological advancements brought by trade. This isolation would not last for long...



Europe: Part 1 - Late Middle Ages (1300s)

Thanks to the Second Agricultural Revolution, the population was booming. Between 1100-1300 the population had doubled. The needs of these people could no longer be met on just the feudal manors.

With the population boom and with the stability brought by the Feudal System, there began to be an increasing number of towns. The movement of people to towns/cities is called Urbanization. The towns had merchants and craftsmen to make goods for the growing numbers of people. The towns traded with each other, soon creating a regional trade network within Europe. Soon, these towns grew into powerful cities.

Italian Revival

The first region to experience the resurgence and growth of cities was Italy. Northern Italy had held on to many of the Roman traditions and had never lost contact with the Byzantine Empire. Thus, the Feudal System never took hold.

As trade was rekindled, the Italian cities were the first to reap the benefits. Cities like Florence and Venice were located near waterways. The Italians quickly took the lead as being the best (and... only) shipbuilders and sailors in Europe. This allowed merchants to buy and sell goods to other civilizations across the sea. Soon after, the Italian cities were trading across the Mediterranean Sea with Egypt, the Ottomans and the Byzantines.



Rise of the Bourgeoisie

All of this trading and craft making created a new group of people: the Bourgeoisie. This new rich middle class of merchants and craftsmen did not "fit" into the Feudal system and they began to put cracks into the feudal way of life. The bourgeoisie did not swear loyalty or allegiance to any noble, thus the nobles could not control them.

The bourgeoisie craftsmen formed guilds: associations that protected the rights and privileges of its members, not controlled by the government. For example - all of the shoe makers would get together, set prices and policies so that all members could benefit. The shoe makers realized they had more power working together and looking out for each other, then competing with one another. The guilds became powerful institutions within a city. The bourgeoisie had money to spend and were looking for ways to spend it to show others they were rich. This created a demand for art and luxury goods, which helped boost other aspects of the city economies.



Commercial Revolution

As the riches began to flow, the Italians helped kick start the Commercial Revolution. The Commercial Revolution was when Europeans developed many economic tools to help them trade. One of the first tools was the bank. Banks were allowed to loan money to traders and farmers in exchange for interest. The banks could write a bill of exchange: a letter telling the bank that one person is to receive a certain amount of money from another persons account (*example: Joe wants to buy grain from Pete. Joe writes a Bill of Exchange to Pete for 20 gold coins to pay for the grain. Pete goes to the bank with the Bill of Exchange and receives 20 gold coins*).



The banks would also oversee Joint-Stock Companies. Joint Stock Companies are businesses owned by share holders who share the companies risk and reward. (*Example: Mario wants to open a shipping business trading goods between Europe and the Islamic Empire. It is very expensive but can bring in a great amount of profit. Mario approaches ten bourgeoisie who have extra money and asks them to buy “stock” or a “share” of his new company. If the company does great, all ten share holders would split the profit. Conversely, if the company flops, the loss is shared by all ten people*). These tools quickly spread throughout Europe and helped cities and businesses to rapidly grow.

ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Read & Update the Content Matrix
- 2) Fill out this chart with the the strengths/positives and weaknesses/negatives of each region.

Region	Strengths	Weaknesses
Europe		

- 3) Create an impact chart. As you read you are to evaluate each area on the level of impact the people in that region had on the world culturally, militarily, and economically.
 - Rate each area as to how impactful you believe them to be at the at 1300 AD (■) and at 1500 AD (▲).
 - Draw arrows to show whether they grew or shrunk in impact and influence.
 - If there is change, ask yourself “What caused them to grow or shrink or stagnate in their influence?” and make note of it on your chart.

Examples

