

Empires and Trade 600-1450 CE



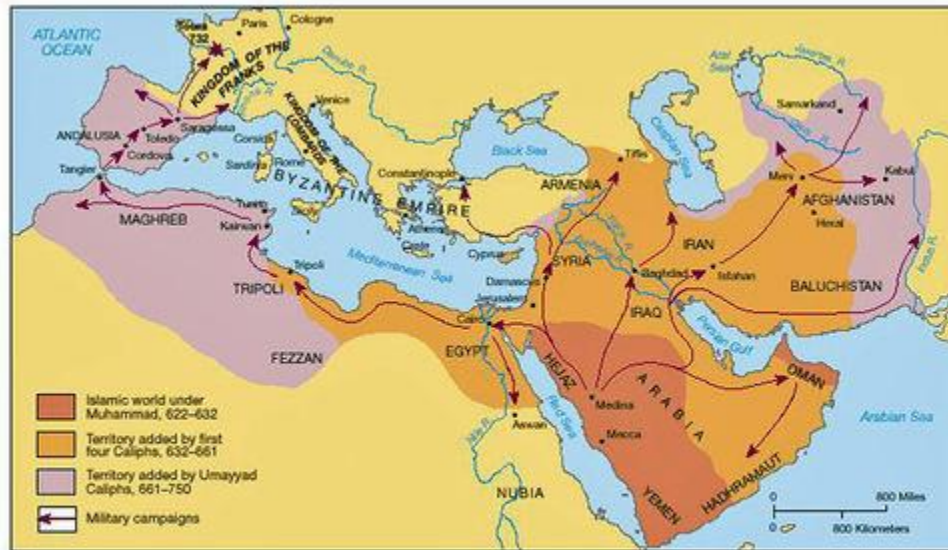
China. In the 7th century, China's Tang emperor sent several military expeditions to the northwest. The purpose of these was to defend the border against nomads, particularly the Turks, but also to take control of much of the western trade routes. ^[29] This expansion (which was eventually stopped by the Abbasids at the **Battle of Talas** in 751) brought many ethnic groups into China's cities. These groups in turn provided commercial links to nomadic and settled people of their Central Asia homelands. As a result, **Chang'an** became intensely cosmopolitan. Serving as both the eastern terminus of the Silk Roads and the northern end of the Grand Canal, this city had large communities of non-Chinese ethnic groups who had settled there to take advantage of trade. By the 9th century, **Uighurs** dominated money lending, **Sogdians** ran the popular imported wine shops, and **Turks** were involved in the trade of many goods and Buddhist relics. ^[30]



Byzantine. As with all empires, the expansion of the Byzantine empire broadened the groups of people participating in commerce. This began in the previous time period when Justinian temporarily conquered parts of northern Africa and Italy from the Vandals. Although these conquests were temporary, Byzantine trade connected Constantinople with commercial cities such as **Alexandria** and **Tripoli** as well as the islands of **Crete** and **Sicily**. When the **Italian city-states** emerged, they depended on imports of grain and textiles coming in from the Byzantine Empire. ^[31] The Empire also served as an important connection between Mediterranean trade and the Arab world. Another group of people pulled into the orbit of Byzantine trade was the state of **Kievan Rus**, or Russia. **Kiev** was an important mid point on the north/south trade routes connecting **Constantinople** to the fur traders of **Novgorod** and **Scandinavia**.



Mongols. Having dissolved tribal loyalties and forged an unstoppable nomadic cavalry on the Central Asia steppes, **Genghis Khan** went on to conquer the largest land empire in history. The duration of the Mongol Empire was short compared to others, but never before or since has a single empire controlled the Eurasian land mass from China to Eastern Europe. When the conquests were done the entire length of the **Silk Roads** was in their domain and the Mongols settled down and enjoyed the benefits of trade. In an era known as the **Pax Mongolica**, or Peace of the Mongols, trade flourished under the protection of a flexible legal system and diplomatic protocols. They punished thieves and pirates. To extend commercial connections to Western European markets, the Mongols encouraged the building of port cities such as **Kaffa** on the Black Sea. They pushed trade outside of their empire by forcing Chinese to emigrate to South East Asia and form merchant communities in the trading ports there. In **Cambodia, Vietnam, the Malay peninsula and Java**, Chinese diaspora communities connected Mongol trade routes to foreign trading ports of the **Indian Ocean** network. ^[32]



The Spread of Islam. The rapid spread of Islam created within a century a unified cultural and economic zone from India to the Atlantic Ocean within.

The Islamic Caliphates. Unlike some other belief systems, Islam has been pro-trade from the beginning (Mohammed was a merchant) and trade accounted in part for the rapid spread of the faith. Merchants traveled farther than armies and took their religion to remote areas of Eurasia. As new areas were incorporated into the **Dar al Islam**, its protective legal system and positive acceptance of merchants created welcome haven of exchange. Banks and credit emerged. Crops such as rice, wheat, eggplant and citrus were transplanted across Islamic civilization thus creating year-round cultivation in some areas. The **trans-Saharan** trade in **salt** took Islam to **West Africa** thus bringing the **Sub-Saharan region** into Afro-Eurasian networks. Seeking **furs** from northern Europe, Muslim merchants traveled to **Russia** and **Scandinavia** with silk and metal wares. The nature of the Indian Ocean trade it perfect for carrying bulk items such as spices, and Islam diffused to the Africa's **Swahili Coast**. In South East Asia, the port city of **Malacca** became an Islamic Sultanate around the year 1400 and remained so until the Portuguese showed up in 1511.