

The West and the Changing Balance of World Power

The Decline of the Old Order

- The Byzantine Empire and the Islamic Caliphate continued to dominate the Middle East into the 13th century. However, by the mid-15th century, the **Ottoman Turks** had taken Constantinople.
- Cultural change came to the Middle East with political change. The popularity of the **Sufi** accompanied a general shift toward mysticism and away from the sciences. A widespread decline in agriculture meant the reduction of many peasants to serfdom.
- Fragmentation of the Islamic world continued under the Ottoman Empire. The Mongols had taken advantage of the fragmentation, but their decline again left a power vacuum.
- The new **Ming Dynasty** emerged in 1368, pushing out the Mongols. Ming emperors began a series of trading voyages to India in 1405, led by admiral **Zenghe**. The expeditions were stopped in 1433, and this line of development was not pursued. Instead, the emperors turned to strengthening their position in China, pursuing traditional policies.

The Rise of the West

- The 15th century was a period of profound change in the West. The aristocracy was losing its place as the defenders and leaders, turning to jousting and court ritual. Famine and the **Black Death** had deeply changed European culture and society. One-third of the population had died in 30 years.
- The medieval monarchies retained their vigor. The European economy revived, after a period of decline, along with increasing urbanization.
- The expansion of the Mongol Empire had brought the west into more contact with the east. A variety of innovations made their way to Europe: the compass, paper, gunpowder. The great demand for eastern luxury goods led to a gold drain to the east. This demand, added to the threat of the Ottoman Empire, impelled Europeans to seek new routes to the east.
- The **Italian Renaissance**, a cultural and political movement that looked to the antique past, began to take shape in the 14th century. The individual was central to the Renaissance.
- Florence was preeminent in the Renaissance, extolled by men such as the poet **Francesco Petrarch**. The painter **Giotto** began to move painting away from

medieval canons, aiming at more realism. Italian trade continued to flourish, providing the funding for these cultural developments.

- The Iberian peninsula was another area of dynamism in the 15th century. The *Reconquista*, the conquest of the peninsula under Christian monarchs, was completed by the end of the century under the united monarchy of Castile and Aragon.

Western Expansion: The Experimental Phase

- One of the earliest Atlantic voyages was undertaken by the **Vivaldi** brothers. The Vivaldis never returned, but subsequent ventures took Europeans to the Canary Islands, the Madeiras, the Azores, and down the western coast of Africa. The compass and the astrolabe made venturing into open seas possible.
- Prince Henry of Portugal—**Prince Henry the Navigator**—was particularly important in supporting the sciences necessary for trans-Atlantic voyages. He also began the process of colonization, starting with the Azores. A pattern was established: cash crops grown on large estates, and the use of slaves to work the plantations.

Outside the World Network

- Outside the Asia-Africa-European sphere, the Americas and Polynesia developed in relative isolation. Changes in the two areas were making some societies vulnerable to attack.
- The Aztec and Inca empires were fragmented, their central governments controlling their vast territories with difficulty.
- In Polynesia, the period 700 to 1400 saw expansion and migration to the Society Islands. During the same period, Hawaii was part of this greater Polynesian world, but it was cut off from about 1400. Hawaii was divided into small kingdoms, and organized hierarchically.
- Perhaps as early as the 8th century, Polynesians began to settle New Zealand. As in Hawaii the Maori became isolated after 1400, and were particularly vulnerable to western colonizers.
- Patterns perceived around the world can mask independent developments. While some elements, such as technology, were hard links between world regions, other developments were indigenous. Moreover, although increasing ties between regions had an important role, native cultural traditions overwhelmingly survived.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The medieval state, which originated in the Classical Era, and whose fall in 1453 marked the end of the postclassical era was
 - (A) the Song China.
 - (B) the Abbasid Caliphate.
 - (C) Kievan Rus.
 - (D) the Byzantine Empire.
 - (E) the Mameluk Caliphate in Egypt.
2. What change in Islam ended the postclassical age and began a new era?
 - (A) Islamic piety won out over rationalism and began a new era.
 - (B) Mass conversions of Muslims to Christianity began.
 - (C) The secularization of Islamic society began.

- (D) Islamic lands in central Asia and the Middle East fell to Hindu conquerors.
 (E) Muslims began to speak of a messiah and await his coming.
3. In comparison to the fall of the Roman Empire, changes in the Arab caliphate
 (A) had few repercussions on its inhabitants.
 (B) were not due to outside invasions by pastoral nomads.
 (C) produced prolonged economic and political confusion in the Middle East.
 (D) left no religious institutions to support the Islamic faith.
 (E) were not dramatic or sudden but occurred gradually over several centuries.
4. The role of the Arab caliphate in international exchange was
 (A) further disrupted by the rise of the Mongols.
 (B) not restored until the western European nations emerged as great powers.
 (C) restored by the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East.
 (D) restored by the Ming Dynasty in China.
 (E) not restored until the 19th century when Great Britain created an empire that spanned all continents.
5. The Ming Chinese naval expeditions of the early 15th century
 (A) ended because they challenged Confucian values and typical expenditures.
 (B) were followed by the Chinese conquest of southeast Asia.
 (C) were stopped by Muslim navies in the Indian Ocean.
 (D) led to a renewed Chinese interest in scientific and geographic exploration.
 (E) stimulated trade between China and Africa.
6. All of these events led to the weakening or end of medieval western European institutions EXCEPT:
- (A) the Bubonic Plague.
 (B) political and theological attacks on the Roman Catholic church.
 (C) the rise of national monarchies.
 (D) the Ottoman Turk invasion of western Europe.
 (E) the rise of non-aristocratic armies loyal to national monarchs.
7. The Renaissance in Europe
 (A) rejected medieval values.
 (B) was largely a cultural and intellectual movement.
 (C) was a political revolution against the power of the pope.
 (D) was not a rebirth of classical cultures as it borrowed little from Greek, Roman, or Islamic achievements.
 (E) avoided challenging medieval values.
8. The major barrier to west European expansion prior to the 15th century was
 (A) the low level of European technology.
 (B) the lack of interest by western European rulers for acquiring territory.
 (C) the overwhelming power of Muslim and Mongol states.
 (D) religious civil wars that divided western Europe and made overseas expansion impossible.
 (E) the lack of popular interest and public funds to support expansion.
9. The first western European nation to establish an overseas empire in the 15th century was
 (A) the Netherlands.
 (B) Sweden.
 (C) Portugal.
 (D) France.
 (E) Spain.
10. The first European colonial estates
 (A) were set up to export foodstuffs back to Europe.
 (B) were set up to receive excess populations and alleviate overpopulation at home.
 (C) were unsuccessful and failed.

- (D) were set up to produce cash crops like sugar to supply European markets.
(E) caused very few ecological, environmen-

tal, and demographic disruptions in the Atlantic islands.

Free-Response Question

The postclassical period saw the rise and fall of the Mongol Empire. What trading and cultural links emerged to replace the role of the Mongols in international affairs?

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (D) is correct.** The Byzantine Empire's place in the postclassical era was key because of its geographic position, between the Christian and Islamic worlds, and because it was a survivor of the Classical Era.
- **2. (A) is correct.** Although rationalism did not disappear, the popularity of Sufi mysticism grew in this period, at the expense of other lines of inquiry.
- **3. (E) is correct.** While the caliphate was attacked abruptly by Mongol invaders, changes to the political system were more gradual than in western Europe. Also unlike western Europe, a new political entity—the Ottoman state—soon stabilized the area.
- **4. (B) is correct.** The Ottomans were successors to much of the caliphate's political domain, but they did not take over the caliphal role in international commercial and cultural exchange.
- **5. (A) is correct.** The Chinese expeditions led by Zenghe were stopped not by external forces, nor did they lead to lasting trade connections. They were stopped by a new emperor, who wished to change directions, and his bureaucrats who adhered to traditional values.
- **6. (D) is correct.** All of the factors contributed except the Ottoman invasions, which happened centuries later.
- **7. (B) is correct.** The Renaissance was accompanied by political changes, and did represent a shift in medieval culture, but it can best be seen as a cultural movement, stimulated by intellectual change.
- **8. (A) is correct.** All of the answers were factors, but when technology improved, the other hindrances were overcome.
- **9. (C) is correct.** Portugal, under the influence of Prince Henry the Navigator, was the leader in overseas exploration. Portuguese explorations along the African coasts and then into the Indian Ocean led to early establishment of trading outposts.
- **10. (D) is correct.** Answers A and B are also true, but these developments came later in the history of overseas expansion. In the first phase, Europeans extended what they knew to their new colonies.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

The postclassical period saw the rise and fall of the Mongol Empire. What trading and cultural links emerged to replace the role of the Mongols in international affairs?

No power emerged which entirely replaced the Mongol place in creating an international network. Central Asia became more of a barrier than a bridge to the civilizations that surrounded it. Although the Chinese had the power to replace the Mongols, and indeed took the first step in developing an overseas empire, they chose instead to withdraw and expend their energy elsewhere. Europeans, however, began slowly but methodically to establish an overseas empire. Although the international overland networks built by the Mongols were never replaced, by the end of the postclassical period the Europeans were slowly building empires linked by sea travel.

