

Networks of Exchange

AP World History: Modern

What Made the Networks Grow

Unit 2 covers the three great exchange networks of **1200 to 1450** - the Silk Roads, the Indian Ocean, and the trans-Saharan routes - and asks the same question of each: what made trade grow, and what did that growth change?

Three useful explanations link a change to a trading obstacle; their relative importance varied by route and time:

- **Improved commercial practices** - **money economies**, **credit**, and forms of partnership that spread risk.
- **Improved transportation technologies** - better ships, saddles, and navigation.
- **State support** - empires that secured routes and taxed the trade benefited from protecting it.

Demand mattered too: **luxury goods** from Chinese, Persian, and Indian artisans found expanding markets across Afro-Eurasia, and producers increased output to meet that demand.

WHAT IMPROVED	THE OBSTACLE ADDRESSED	EXAMPLES
COMMERCIAL PRACTICES	carrying precious metal as payment was costly and risky	money economies, credit, bills of exchange
TRANSPORT TECHNOLOGY	limited carrying capacity and difficult navigation	camel saddle; larger ships; compass and astrolabe
STATE SUPPORT	insecurity and fragmented political control	protection and institutions could support travel

Explain how a change addressed a **specific obstacle**. Its effects varied by route and time; listing an invention does not yet explain trade growth

The Silk Roads

The **Silk Roads** carried high-value, low-bulk goods overland across Eurasia: silk, porcelain, spices, and precious metals.

Its enabling innovations were commercial as much as technical - **caravanserais** along the routes, the use of **paper money** and **bills of exchange** in China, and forms of credit that let merchants trade without carrying bullion.

Demand for exports encouraged Chinese, Persian and Indian producers to expand textiles and porcelain production; iron and steel manufacture also expanded in China. Trading cities such as **Kashgar** and **Samarkand** gained from the flow of merchants and goods. These routes existed before 1200: the change was expansion and intensification, not their invention. A caravanseraï supplied lodging and a place for exchange; credit reduced the need to transport all payment as precious metal.

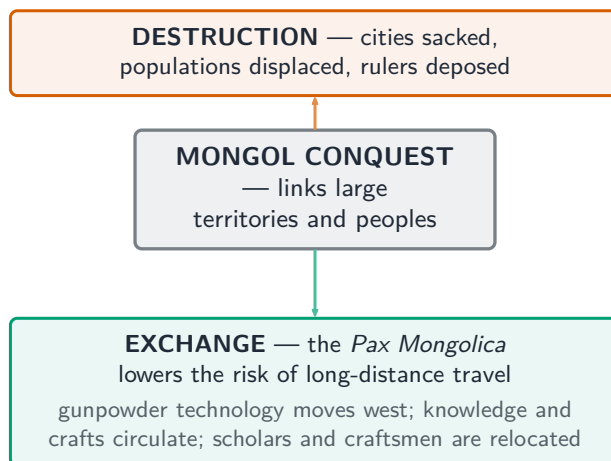
The Mongol Empire

The **Mongol Empire** expanded through organised military force, including effective cavalry tactics, as rival states weakened or fragmented. Conquest displaced populations and overthrew rulers. Successor **khanates**, including Yuan China and the Ilkhanate in Iran, developed distinct political and cultural settings; the whole network did not remain one uniformly peaceful state throughout 1200–1450.

Mongol expansion **facilitated Afro-Eurasian trade and communication** by linking large territories, incorporating new peoples and supporting travel and communications. A relay system helped official messages move; protection and trade-friendly practices could reduce travel risks. The term **Pax Mongolica** describes this period of facilitated connections, not universal peace.

Interregional contacts and conflicts also **encouraged technological and cultural transfers**: gunpowder technology moved west, knowledge and crafts circulated, and scholars and craftsmen were relocated across the empire. The adoption of Uyghur script and the circulation of Greco–Islamic medical knowledge illustrate transfers; local traditions also influenced Mongol rulers. Some rulers adopted their subjects' religions or tolerated varied practices to support legitimacy.

Political violence and increased connections could coexist. Explain the particular effect a prompt asks about; destruction and exchange do not automatically cancel each other, and not every response needs both.



Conquest and exchange could coexist. Explain the effect asked about; khanates differed and peace was not universal

The Indian Ocean

	What it carried	What enabled it	What it changed
Silk Roads	silk, porcelain, spices high value, low bulk	caravanserai, paper money, bills of exchange	wealthy route cities; artisans expand output
Indian Ocean	textiles, timber, grain bulk and luxury goods	monsoons; compass; astrolabe; larger ships	Swahili states and Malacca; diasporic communities
Trans-Saharan	gold north, salt south	camel saddle, organised caravans	Mali: route protection and taxation

Relative patterns, not exclusive cargo lists or identical outcomes

Compare a common feature using specific evidence from each network

The **Indian Ocean** network moved bulkier goods than the Silk Roads - textiles, timber, grain, and spices - because ships could carry larger cargoes at lower transport cost per unit. This is a relative tendency, not a rule that maritime trade carried only cheap bulk goods: luxury goods also travelled by sea.

Seasonally changing **monsoon winds** helped merchants plan outward and return voyages. Environmental knowledge worked with larger ship designs, the **lateen sail**

, vessels such as the **dhow** , and navigational tools including the **compass** and **astrolabe** . The compass helped indicate direction and the astrolabe supported celestial observations. These tools improved navigation; they did not make winds irrelevant or every voyage safe.

Important effects included:

- The network **fostered the growth of states**, such as the Swahili city-states on the East African coast, Gujarat and the Sultanate of Malacca.
- Merchants established **diasporic communities** in key ports, introducing their own culture while adopting local ways. Arab and Persian communities in East Africa and Chinese merchant communities in Southeast Asia are examples. Cultural change could operate in both directions.
- The movement of people included free merchants and **coerced labour**; trade was not uniformly free or voluntary. Do not treat every merchant or sailor as enslaved.



Ming voyages led by **Zheng He** illustrate state-sponsored maritime connections in the early fifteenth century. They encouraged diplomatic and cultural contacts across existing Indian Ocean networks, rather than creating those networks from nothing.

Trans-Saharan Trade

The **trans-Saharan** routes crossed the desert on innovations in existing technology - above all the **camel saddle** and organised **caravans** .

Gold from West Africa moved north and **salt** moved south. The expansion of empires, including **Mali** , facilitated Afro-Eurasian trade by securing the routes and taxing them - and **Mansa Musa** . 's pilgrimage demonstrated Mali's wealth and connections to the Islamic world. Desert transport and state activity interacted; a camel saddle alone does not explain the entire growth of a trading empire.

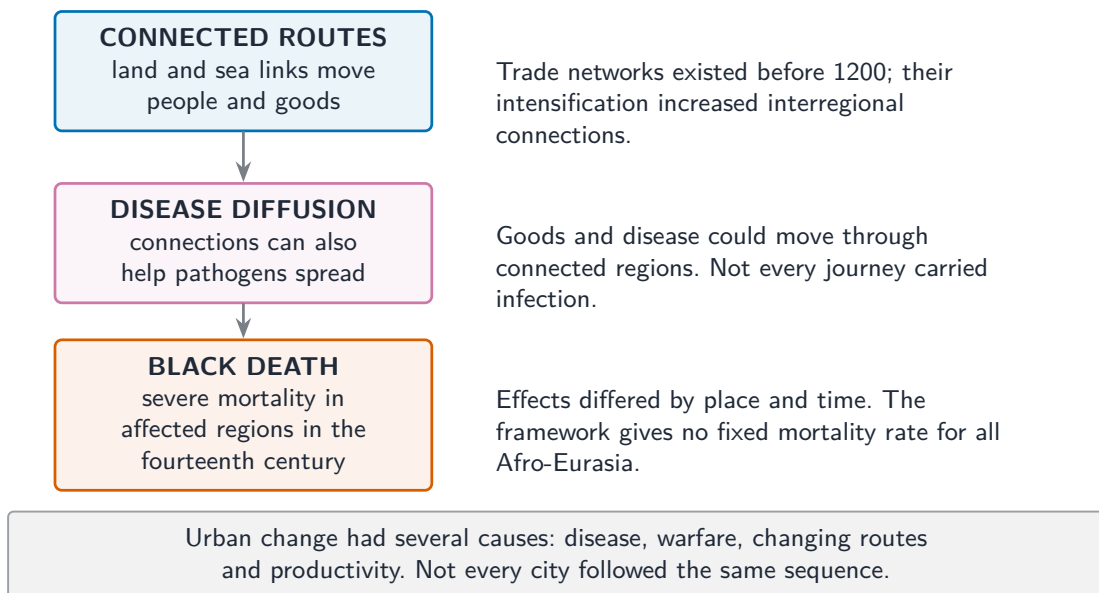
Cultural and Environmental Consequences

Increased cross-cultural interaction produced **diffusion** of literary, artistic, scientific, and religious traditions - the spread of Islam along trade routes, Buddhist influence in East Asia and Hindu and Buddhist influence in Southeast Asia, and the movement of scientific and mathematical knowledge.

Travellers such as **Ibn Battuta** , **Marco Polo** and Margery Kempe wrote accounts as connections intensified. Such accounts are evidence to interpret: ask about the writer's purpose, audience, viewpoint and access to information. A traveller's description does not automatically represent every person or place.

The **fate of cities varied**: some declined as routes shifted or invasions came, while others grew into major commercial centres.

The environmental consequences were as large as the cultural ones. Continued **diffusion of crops and pathogens** linked environmental change to exchange. Examples include bananas in Africa, new rice varieties in East Asia and citrus around the Mediterranean. Crops could support agricultural production and population growth where local conditions allowed. Epidemic disease also moved through connections: the **Black Death** spread across connected regions in the fourteenth century and caused severe mortality. Effects varied; neither an absence of all prior immunity nor a fixed death rate for all Afro-Eurasia follows from the syllabus. City decline could reflect epidemic disease, warfare or changing routes; urban growth could reflect productivity and trade. Do not turn these separate processes into an inevitable four-step sequence.



Comparison of Economic Exchange

Compare the networks on a common feature and support the relationship with specific evidence. A prompt may require similarities, differences, causes, effects or an argument about extent. A causal explanation is not required merely because a question asks for a comparison; follow its command and rubric.

Original worked comparison. Explain one difference in typical cargo between the Silk Roads and Indian Ocean networks during 1200–1450.

Worked check. Both carried luxuries, but long-distance overland transport favoured high-value, low-bulk goods such as silk, while ships also made bulk cargoes such as timber and grain more feasible. Their larger carrying capacity lowered transport cost per unit. This states a shared basis, evidence from both networks and a mechanism; it is not a guaranteed full-score response to every exam prompt.

Worked practice

All tasks below are original; attempt before reading the checks. They practise demands found in the cited syllabus and released questions.

1. Explain an enabler. A caravanserai provides lodging and a place to exchange goods along an overland route. Explain how this could encourage trade, then distinguish it from the effect of a bill of exchange.

Check. Lodging and exchange facilities support merchants on a long journey. A bill of exchange is a commercial arrangement that can reduce the need to carry precious metal as payment. Both can encourage trade, but their mechanisms differ.

2. Environment and technology. A merchant plans an Indian Ocean outward journey and return around seasonal wind changes. Explain the role of environmental knowledge and why a compass is a different kind of enabler.

Check. Knowledge of monsoons helps time journeys to seasonal sailing conditions. A compass helps indicate direction; it does not control the wind. Knowledge and technology can work together without being interchangeable.

3. State building and exchange. Explain one way Mongol expansion supported communication and one reason cultural practices could spread through the khanates.

Check. Linked territories and relay stations helped official messages travel over long distances. Contact among peoples, movement of specialists and rulers' adoption or toleration of local traditions could encourage cultural transfers. Explain the chosen relationship rather than assuming political conquest created universal peace.

4. Evaluate an argument. Assess: "Between 1200 and 1450, growing exchange brought only benefits." Use one cultural or economic example and one environmental example, then qualify the judgement.

Check. Expanded trade supported cities and circulation of cultural and technical knowledge. It also helped epidemic disease move, with severe human losses. Benefits and harms varied by people, place and time, so a one-sided universal claim is not

defensible. These are building blocks for an argument, not a complete essay or a universal scoring formula.

5. Interpret a source. Original fictional source description: a merchant writes to potential partners praising a port's profitable markets. Identify a plausible purpose and explain one limit of using the account to represent life in the whole city.

Check. The writer may aim to attract business partners, making profitable commerce especially relevant to the audience. The account reveals a merchant's perspective, but praise of markets alone does not establish the experiences of every resident. This is an invented source exercise, not an attributed medieval quotation.

Exam tips

Select evidence that answers the particular prompt in its period. Identify a development when asked to identify; explain how or why when asked to explain; support an argument with relevant evidence when asked to evaluate. "Because" can express reasoning, but the word itself earns no automatic credit. A particular question does not require every cause or consequence in this handout. Preserve distinctions: commodity versus enabler, environment versus technology, continuity versus expansion, and relative tendency versus absolute rule.

Sources and demand grounding

Local AP World History CED Unit 2, topics 2.1–2.7, PDF pages 61–70 (printed 54–63), supplies the scope and required historical developments. The official course page and fall-2026 clarification confirm that course content is unchanged while exam presentation changes for May 2027. Older question formats are used here for historical demand, not as the current paper template.

Local 2024 set 2 SAQ 3 and official guidelines (QP PDF page 4; scheme pages 6–7) were read for Mongol state-building, communication and cultural-transfer demands. Local 2025 set 2 SAQ 3A and scheme (QP PDF page 5; scheme page 6) were read for the diffusion of gunpowder before 1500; later-period parts B/C are outside this unit's time scope. Original practice is not a quotation of these questions. The Metropolitan Museum's Mongol history and collections essay supports the distinction between destruction, connected khanates and cultural transfer. No invented mark guarantee, traveller quotation or numerical mortality claim is used.

Vocabulary card meanings

money economies: Systems in which goods are bought and sold with currency rather than only bartered. Improved transportation technologies: Better ships, roads, and saddles that moved goods farther. State support: Backing from a government, in money, protection, or policy. luxury goods: High-value items such as silk, spices, and porcelain, traded over long distances. Silk Roads: The overland routes that carried goods and ideas between East Asia and the Mediterranean. caravanserai: Roadside inns where caravans could rest and trade. paper money: Currency printed on paper,

used extensively in Song China. bills of exchange: Written orders that let merchants transfer money without carrying coin. Mongol Empire: The thirteenth-century empire that linked much of Eurasia under Mongol rule. Pax Mongolica: The relative security of travel across Mongol lands that encouraged trade. lateen sail: A triangular sail that let ships sail closer to the wind. dhow: A sailing ship used in Indian Ocean trade. The paired Chinese label adds a single mast, which not every example has. astrolabe: An instrument used to find latitude from the stars. camel saddle: A seat that let camels carry heavier loads across deserts. caravans: Groups of merchants and animals travelling together for safety. Mali: A West African empire enriched by gold and by control of Saharan trade. travellers: People such as merchants and pilgrims whose journeys spread news and goods. Black Death: The fourteenth-century plague that killed a huge share of Eurasia's population. Improved commercial practices: New habits of credit, partnership, and record-keeping that eased trade. Kashgar: An oasis city where Silk Road routes met in Central Asia. Samarkand: A Central Asian city famous as a market and a centre of learning. khanates: The successor states into which the Mongol empire split. Mansa Musa: The Mali ruler whose pilgrimage displayed the empire's gold. Ibn Battuta: A Moroccan traveller whose writings describe much of the fourteenth-century Islamic world. Marco Polo: A Venetian traveller whose account described Yuan China for European readers.