**The Age of Discovery**

**SUMMARY**:

* European medieval knowledge about Asia beyond the reach of Byzantine Empire was sourced in partial reports, often obscured by legends.
* In 1154, Arab geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi created what would be known as the Tabula Rogeriana—a description of the world and world map. It contains maps showing the Eurasian continent in its entirety, but only the northern part of the African continent. It remained the most accurate world map for the next three centuries.
* Indian Ocean trade routes were sailed by Arab traders. Between 1405 and 1421, the Yongle Emperor of Ming China sponsored a series of long range tributary missions. The fleets visited Arabia, East Africa, India, Maritime Southeast Asia, and Thailand.
* A series of European expeditions crossing Eurasia by land in the late Middle Ages marked a prelude to the Age of Discovery. Although the Mongols had threatened Europe with pillage and destruction, Mongol states also unified much of Eurasia and, from 1206 on, the *Pax Mongolica* allowed safe trade routes and communication lines stretching from the Middle East to China.
* Christian embassies were sent as far as Karakorum during the Mongol invasions of Syria. The first of these travelers was Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, who journeyed to Mongolia and back from 1241 to 1247. Others traveled to various regions of Asia between 13th and the third quarter of the 15th centuries; these travelers included Russian Yaroslav of Vladimir and his sons Alexander Nevsky and Andrey II of Vladimir, French André de Longjumeau and Flemish William of Rubruck, Moroccan Ibn Battuta, and Italian Niccolò de’ Conti.
* Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant, dictated an account of journeys throughout Asia from 1271 to 1295. Although he was not the first European to reach China, he was the first to leave a detailed chronicle of his experience. The book inspired Christopher Columbus and many other travelers in the following Age of Discovery.

**Pax Mongolica**

A historiographical term, modeled after the original phrase *Pax Romana*, which describes the stabilizing effects of the conquests of the Mongol Empire on the social, cultural, and economic life of the inhabitants of the vast Eurasian territory that the Mongols conquered in the 13th and 14th centuries. The term is used to describe the eased communication and commerce that the unified administration helped to create, and the period of relative peace that followed the Mongols’ vast conquests.

**Tabula Rogeriana**

A book containing a description of the world and world map created by the Arab geographer, Muhammad al-Idrisi, in 1154. Written in Arabic, it is divided into seven climate zones and contains maps showing the Eurasian continent in its entirety, but only the northern part of the African continent. The map is oriented with the North at the bottom. It remained the most accurate world map for the next three centuries.

**Maritime republics**

City-states that flourished in Italy and across the Mediterranean. From the 10th to the 13th centuries, they built fleets of ships both for their own protection and to support extensive trade networks across the Mediterranean, giving them an essential role in the Crusades.

**Europe’s Early Trade Links**

A prelude to the Age of Discovery was a series of European land expeditions across Eurasia in the late Middle Ages. These expeditions were undertaken by a number of explorers, including Marco Polo, who left behind a detailed and inspiring record of his travels across Asia. It is important to understand the exploration of Eurasia in the Middle Ages by Marco Polo, and why it was a prelude to the advent of the Age of Discovery in the 15th Century

**Background**

European medieval knowledge about Asia beyond the reach of Byzantine Empire was sourced in partial reports, often obscured by legends, dating back from the time of the conquests of Alexander the Great and his successors. In 1154, Arab geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi created what would be known as the *Tabula Rogeriana* at the court of King Roger II of Sicily. The book, written in Arabic, is a description of the world and world map. It is divided into seven climate zones and contains maps showing the Eurasian continent in its entirety, but only the northern part of the African continent. It remained the most accurate world map for the next three centuries, but it also demonstrated that Africa was only partially known to either Christians, Genoese and Venetians, or the Arab seamen, and its southern extent was unknown. Knowledge about the Atlantic African coast was fragmented, and derived mainly from old Greek and Roman maps based on Carthaginian knowledge, including the time of Roman exploration of Mauritania. The Red Sea was barely known and only trade links with the Maritime republics, the Republic of Venice especially, fostered collection of accurate maritime knowledge.

Indian Ocean trade routes were sailed by Arab traders. Between 1405 and 1421, the Yongle Emperor of Ming China sponsored a series of long-range tributary missions. The fleets visited Arabia, East Africa, India, Maritime Southeast Asia, and Thailand. But the journeys, reported by Ma Huan, a Muslim voyager and translator, were halted abruptly after the emperor’s death, and were not followed up, as the Chinese Ming Dynasty retreated in the haijin, a policy of isolationism, having limited maritime trade.

**Prelude to The Age Of Discovery**

A series of European expeditions crossing Eurasia by land in the late Middle Ages marked a prelude to the Age of Discovery. Although the Mongols had threatened Europe with pillage and destruction, Mongol states also unified much of Eurasia and, from 1206 on, the Pax Mongolica allowed safe trade routes and communication lines stretching from the Middle East to China. A series of Europeans took advantage of these in order to explore eastward. Most were Italians, as trade between Europe and the Middle East was controlled mainly by the Maritime republics.

Christian embassies were sent as far as Karakorum during the Mongol invasions of Syria, from which they gained a greater understanding of the world. The first of these travelers was Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, who journeyed to Mongolia and back from 1241 to 1247. About the same time, Russian prince Yaroslav of Vladimir, and subsequently his sons, Alexander Nevsky and Andrey II of Vladimir, traveled to the Mongolian capital. Though having strong political implications, their journeys left no detailed accounts. Other travelers followed, like French André de Longjumeau and Flemish William of Rubruck, who reached China through Central Asia. From 1325 to 1354, a Moroccan scholar from Tangier, Ibn Battuta, journeyed through North Africa, the Sahara desert, West Africa, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, having reached China. In 1439, Niccolò de’ Conti published an account of his travels as a Muslim merchant to India and Southeast Asia and, later in 1466-1472, Russian merchant Afanasy Nikitin of Tver travelled to India.

Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant, dictated an account of journeys throughout Asia from 1271 to 1295. His travels are recorded in *Book of the Marvels of the World*, (also known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*, c. 1300),a book which did much to introduce Europeans to Central Asia and China. Marco Polo was not the first European to reach China, but he was the first to leave a detailed chronicle of his experience. The book inspired Christopher Columbus and many other travelers.

**The Age of Discovery**

The geographical exploration of the late Middle Ages eventually led to what today is known as the Age of Discovery: a loosely defined European historical period, from the 15th century to the 18th century, that witnessed extensive overseas exploration emerge as a powerful factor in European culture and globalization. Many lands previously unknown to Europeans were discovered during this period, though most were already inhabited, and, from the perspective of non-Europeans, the period was not one of discovery, but one of invasion and the arrival of settlers from a previously unknown continent. Global exploration started with the successful Portuguese travels to the Atlantic archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, the coast of Africa, and the sea route to India in 1498; and, on behalf of the Crown of Castile (Spain), the trans-Atlantic Voyages of Christopher Columbus between 1492 and 1502, as well as the first circumnavigation of the globe in 1519-1522. These discoveries led to numerous naval expeditions across the **Atlantic**, **Indian and Pacific oceans**, and **land expeditions in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Australia** that continued into the late 19th century, and ended with the exploration of the polar regions in the 20th century.