

Unit 1: The Global Tapestry, c. 1200–1450

Unit 1 covers how states in East Asia, the Islamic world, South and Southeast Asia, the Americas, Africa, and Europe built and legitimized power from about 1200 to 1450. CED topics 1.1 through 1.6.

AP World History

The Global Tapestry

About 12 minutes to read

How to use this guide

Read it in order the first time, one region at a time. For each region, ask the same two questions. How did rulers build and hold power. How did they convince people that power was legitimate. The exam constantly compares regions, so after each section, pause and ask what was similar to the region before it and what was different.

After the first read, use the trap boxes and the tables to review the distinctions that exam questions test most often. Finish with the practice questions, then complete the recall check on the last page out loud and note any items you cannot explain yet.

Why this unit matters. Unit 1 introduces the comparison habit the whole course runs on. Every region here answers the same problem, organizing people and collecting revenue, with different tools. Confucian bureaucracy, Islamic Turkic states, Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, American tribute empires, African trading states, and European feudalism are six different answers to one question. You will use these comparisons again in later units.

1.1 Developments in East Asia from c. 1200 to c. 1450

The **Song Dynasty of China** ruled from 960 to 1279. Its rulers kept power through two linked systems. **Confucianism**, the philosophy and social ethic built on the teachings of Confucius, supplied the justification. It taught moral governance, respect for hierarchy, and **filial piety**, the deep devotion owed to parents and ancestors. The **imperial bureaucracy** supplied the machinery. Officials were chosen by merit through civil service examinations rooted in Confucian learning, which meant the state could administer a large empire without depending on hereditary nobles.

Neo-Confucianism was the revived, more philosophical form of the tradition, blending Confucian ethics with Buddhist and Daoist ideas. It became highly influential in East Asian thought and education during this period. **Buddhism** itself continued to shape Asian societies in many branches, including **Tibetan Buddhism**, the distinct Mahayana branch that blended Buddhist teachings with local Tibetan practices.

Trap. Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism are not interchangeable on the exam. Confucianism is the original social ethic of hierarchy and moral governance. Neo-Confucianism is the later revival that folded in Buddhist and Daoist philosophy. If a question mentions metaphysics or the blending of traditions, it is pointing at Neo-Confucianism.

Why the Song economy grew

The Song presided over a **commercialization of the economy**, a shift toward markets, trade networks, and manufacturing. Two material causes sit underneath that growth. **Champa rice**, a fast-ripening and drought-resistant strain brought from the Champa region of present-day Vietnam, raised agricultural output and fed a growing population. The **Grand Canal**, the massive waterway expanded under the Song, moved grain, goods, and tax revenue between the rice-growing south and the political north. The labor behind all of it was largely **free peasant and artisanal labor**, independent farmers and craftspeople rather than enslaved or legally bound workers.

Heian Japan (794-1185) shows the same Chinese influence traveling outward. Japanese elites at the court in Heian, modern Kyoto, adopted Chinese literary, scholarly, and Buddhist traditions and adapted them to Japanese culture rather than copying them unchanged.

Trap. Champa rice and the Grand Canal answer different questions. Champa rice explains why Song China could feed more people. The Grand Canal explains how the state moved that food and collected revenue from it. Questions pair them as causes of commercialization, but they do different work.

1.2 Developments in Dar al-Islam from c. 1200 to c. 1450

Dar al-Islam, Arabic for the abode of Islam, is the collective name for the Muslim world, all lands under Muslim rule from Spain and North Africa through the Middle East to South and Southeast Asia. In this period three monotheistic faiths continued to shape Afro-Eurasian societies. **Islam**, founded on the teachings of Muhammad as revealed in the Qur'an, with its core practices of prayer, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage. **Judaism**, one of the oldest monotheistic religions, rooted in the covenant described in the Hebrew Bible. **Christianity**, centered on Jesus Christ. The exam treats all three as forces shaping societies, not as theologies to be summarized.

The political story of the period is fragmentation followed by rebuilding. The **Abbasid Caliphate**, centered in Baghdad, ruled much of the Muslim world from 750 to 1258. As it fragmented, **new Islamic political entities** emerged, most of them dominated by **Turkic peoples**, Central Asian groups including the Seljuks and Mamluks who converted to Islam and took power. These states showed continuity, innovation, and diversity in Islamic governance. Islam continued as the shared religion even as Turkic rulers replaced the Abbasids.

NEW ENTITY	WHAT TO KNOW
Seljuk Empire	A Turkic Islamic empire controlling much of the Middle East from the 11th to 13th centuries. One of the first of the new entities to rise as Abbasid power declined.
Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt	Ruled Egypt and Syria by former slave-soldiers of Turkic origin. Famously halted the Mongol advance in the Middle East.
Delhi Sultanates	A series of Turkic-led Muslim dynasties ruling northern India from the 13th to 16th centuries, establishing Islamic political power in South Asia.

Trap. The Abbasids did not fall and leave nothing behind. Their fragmentation is the cause, and the Seljuk, Mamluk, and Delhi states are the effect. Questions that ask what followed Abbasid decline want the new Turkic-led entities, not a single successor empire.

How Islam spread and what it carried

Islam moved through both military expansion and peaceful contact. **Sufis**, Muslim mystics devoted to a personal relationship with God, carried the faith across Afro-Eurasia alongside merchants and missionaries. Muslim states also drove **Islamic intellectual innovations and transfers**, scholarly advances in mathematics, medicine, and philosophy, including the preservation and commentary on Greek thought. The **House of Wisdom** in Abbasid Baghdad, the great library and translation center, is the concrete symbol of that work, where scholars preserved, translated, and built upon Greek, Persian, and Indian knowledge.

1.3 Developments in South and Southeast Asia from c. 1200 to c. 1450

Hinduism, the diverse tradition centered on dharma, karma, rebirth, and devotion to deities such as Vishnu and Shiva, continued to shape South and Southeast Asia. Within it, the **Bhakti movement** spread a devotional alternative, personal love and devotion to a chosen deity rather than ritual and priestly mediation. The period also produced **new Hindu and Buddhist states** that combined religious legitimacy with local governance, another case of continuity, innovation, and diversity in state formation.

STATE	WHAT TO KNOW
Vijayanagara Empire	Powerful Hindu empire in southern India, 14th to 16th centuries. Resisted the Delhi Sultanates and patronized Hindu temple culture.
Srivijaya Empire	Buddhist maritime trading empire centered in Sumatra, roughly 7th to 13th centuries. Controlled key straits of Southeast Asian trade.
Khmer Empire	Hindu-Buddhist empire centered at Angkor in Cambodia, roughly 9th to 15th centuries. Built monumental temple complexes such as Angkor Wat.
Majapahit	Hindu-Buddhist thalassocratic empire based in Java, 13th to 16th centuries. Dominated trade across the Indonesian archipelago.
Rajput kingdoms	Hindu warrior-kingdoms of northwestern India ruled by Rajput clans, known for resisting Delhi Sultanate expansion.

Trap. Vijayanagara and the Delhi Sultanates are opponents, not allies. Vijayanagara was the Hindu power in the south that resisted the Turkic Muslim Delhi Sultanates in the north. Questions that set them against each other are testing whether you keep that rivalry straight.

1.4 State Building in the Americas

The Americas built states without the Afro-Eurasian toolkit. No draft animals, no iron, no writing system shared across regions, yet the political results were just as organized. The **Maya city-states** were independent urban centers in Mesoamerica and the Yucatan, each ruled by a divine king, competing and trading with one another rather than uniting under one ruler. The **Mexica**, the Nahuatl people who built the Aztec Empire, centered their state on Tenochtitlan in the Valley of Mexico. The **Inca** built an Andean empire centered at Cuzco in Peru that by the 1400s controlled a vast territory along the western coast of South America. **Cahokia**, the large Mississippian center near present-day St. Louis, was the biggest pre-Columbian city north of Mexico, built around great earthen mounds.

Trap. City-states and empires are different answers. The Maya stayed politically fragmented under separate divine kings. The Mexica and Inca built large tribute empires. If a question asks which American society was organized as competing independent cities, that is the Maya, not the Mexica or Inca.

1.5 State Building in Africa

African states in this period grew from trade. **Great Zimbabwe** was a wealthy stone-walled city and trading state in southeastern Africa, roughly 11th to 15th centuries, that grew rich on the Indian Ocean gold trade. **Ethiopia**, the Christian kingdom in the Horn of Africa, expanded the scope and reach of its state system and stands as one of Africa's enduring states. The **Hausa kingdoms**, a group of city-states in West Africa in present-day Nigeria, prospered on trans-Saharan trade.

Notice the pattern. Great Zimbabwe faced the Indian Ocean. The Hausa kingdoms faced the Sahara. In both cases, controlling the trade route paid for the state. That is the same logic as Srivijaya controlling the straits in Southeast Asia, and it is worth comparing across regions when the exam asks for similarities.

1.6 Developments in Europe from c. 1200 to c. 1450

Europe in this period ran on **political decentralization**, the fragmentation of authority among competing rulers and lords rather than one central state. Its kingdoms were **decentralized monarchies**, where the king's authority was limited and shared with powerful nobles. Two systems organized that fragmentation. **Feudalism** was the political and social system in which lords granted land, called fiefs, to vassals in exchange for military service and loyalty. The **manorial system** was the economic organization underneath it, in which peasants worked a lord's manor in exchange for protection and the right to farm small plots.

The labor that worked the manors came in two kinds. **Serfdom** was coerced agricultural labor. Serfs were legally bound to the land and owed labor and dues to their lord. Alongside it stood **free and coerced labor** more broadly, the mix of independent peasants and bound workers that made up medieval European agriculture. Europe stayed a largely agricultural society dependent on both.

SYSTEM	WHAT IT ORGANIZES	THE KEY RELATIONSHIP
Feudalism	Politics and military service	Lord to vassal. Land for loyalty and fighting.
Manorial system	The economy	Lord to peasant. Land use for labor and dues.
Serfdom	Labor on the manor	Lord to serf. The serf is bound to the land itself.

Trap. Feudalism and the manorial system are not synonyms. Feudalism is the political deal between lords and vassals. The manorial system is the economic arrangement between lords and peasants. Serfdom is the coerced labor inside the manorial system. Questions mix these three on purpose, so name which relationship the question describes before you answer.

The comparison to make. Put Europe next to Song China. Both were agricultural societies that needed to feed growing populations and collect revenue. China answered with a centralized imperial bureaucracy staffed by examined Confucian officials. Europe answered with decentralized lords, vassals, and bound peasants. That contrast in tools for the same problem is one of the most tested comparisons in this unit.

Confusions That Cost Points

Most missed questions in this unit come from a short list of pairs that look alike under time pressure. Review each pair carefully so you can tell them apart when you see them in a question.

PAIR	HOW TO SEPARATE THEM
Confucianism vs Neo-Confucianism	Confucianism is the original ethic of hierarchy and moral rule. Neo-Confucianism is the revival that blends in Buddhist and Daoist philosophy.
Abbasid Caliphate vs new Islamic entities	The Abbasids ruled from Baghdad, 750 to 1258. The new entities are the Turkic-led states that replaced them, Seljuk, Mamluk, Delhi.
Seljuk vs Mamluk vs Delhi Sultanates	Seljuks held the Middle East, 11th to 13th centuries. Mamluks ruled Egypt and Syria and stopped the Mongols. Delhi Sultanates ruled northern India, 13th to 16th centuries.
Sufis vs the House of Wisdom	Sufis spread Islam through personal devotion and mysticism. The House of Wisdom spread knowledge through translation and scholarship in Baghdad.
Vijayanagara vs Delhi Sultanates	Vijayanagara was the Hindu south resisting Delhi. Delhi was the Turkic Muslim north expanding into India. Opponents.
Maya city-states vs Mexica and Inca	Maya stayed fragmented under separate divine kings. Mexica and Inca built large tribute empires.
Feudalism vs manorial system	Feudalism is lord to vassal, land for military service. The manorial system is lord to peasant, land use for labor.
Serf vs free peasant	Serfs were legally bound to the land and owed dues. Free peasants worked without that legal bondage. Song China ran largely on free peasant and artisanal labor. Europe used both.

Practice Questions

Original questions written for this guide in the style of the AP exam. Answers and explanations are on the next page, so complete the questions before checking them.

1. A Song Dynasty official earns his post by passing a civil service examination based on Confucian texts. This practice best illustrates which feature of Song governance?

- A. Political decentralization
- B. A merit-based imperial bureaucracy
- C. The manorial system
- D. Rule by Turkic military elites

2. A historian argues that Song China's commercial growth depended on feeding a larger population and moving goods across the empire. Which pair of developments best supports that argument?

- A. Neo-Confucianism and filial piety
- B. Champa rice and the Grand Canal
- C. The House of Wisdom and Sufi mysticism
- D. Feudalism and serfdom

3. After the fragmentation of the Abbasid Caliphate, the states that emerged in the Middle East, Egypt, and northern India were most commonly dominated by which group?

- A. Confucian scholar-officials
- B. European feudal lords
- C. Turkic peoples who had converted to Islam
- D. Buddhist monastic orders

4. Islam spread to parts of Southeast Asia largely through peaceful contact rather than conquest. Which of the following best explains that pattern?

- A. The Abbasid army occupied the Indonesian archipelago
- B. Sufis, merchants, and missionaries carried the faith along trade routes
- C. The Delhi Sultanates conquered Sumatra and Java
- D. European missionaries introduced it during the Crusades

- 5.** The Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt is best known in this period for which achievement?
- A. Building the House of Wisdom in Baghdad
 - B. Halting the Mongol advance in the Middle East
 - C. Establishing Islamic rule over northern India
 - D. Constructing the Grand Canal
- 6.** A temple inscription in southern India celebrates a Hindu kingdom's resistance to Muslim rulers from the north. The kingdom that produced this inscription was most likely
- A. the Delhi Sultanates
 - B. the Mamluk Sultanate
 - C. the Vijayanagara Empire
 - D. the Seljuk Empire
- 7.** A nobleman grants a parcel of land to a warrior in exchange for military service and an oath of loyalty. This arrangement best describes
- A. the manorial system
 - B. feudalism
 - C. serfdom
 - D. the imperial bureaucracy
- 8.** Both Song China and medieval Europe were agricultural societies that depended on peasant labor, but their labor systems differed in an important way. Which statement best captures that difference?
- A. Song China relied on enslaved labor while Europe used free peasants
 - B. Song China depended largely on free peasant and artisanal labor, while Europe mixed free peasants with legally bound serfs
 - C. Europe had no agricultural labor system at all
 - D. Both societies used identical systems of coerced labor

Answer Key

- 1. B.** Examinations rooted in Confucian learning selecting officials by merit is the definition of the imperial bureaucracy. A describes Europe, not China. C is the European economic system. D describes the new Islamic states, not Song China.
- 2. B.** Champa rice raised output to feed more people, and the Grand Canal moved grain and goods across the empire. A names philosophies, not material causes. C belongs to Dar al-Islam. D belongs to Europe.
- 3. C.** The new Islamic political entities were dominated by Turkic peoples such as the Seljuks and Mamluks. A belongs to Song China. B belongs to Europe. D has no role in this development.
- 4. B.** Sufis, merchants, and missionaries carried Islam through peaceful contact along trade routes. A never happened. C confuses the Delhi Sultanates, which ruled northern India, with Southeast Asia. D reverses the direction of religious influence.
- 5. B.** The Mamluks famously halted the Mongol advance in the Middle East. A was the Abbasid project in Baghdad. C was the Delhi Sultanates. D was built in China.
- 6. C.** Vijayanagara was the Hindu empire in southern India that resisted the Delhi Sultanates. A is the northern Muslim power being resisted. B ruled Egypt and Syria. D ruled the Middle East.
- 7. B.** Land granted for military service and loyalty is feudalism, the lord-to-vassal relationship. A is the lord-to-peasant economic arrangement. C is bound labor on the manor. D is the Chinese examination system.
- 8. B.** Song China ran largely on free peasant and artisanal labor within a commercializing economy, while Europe combined free peasants with serfs bound to the land. A reverses the facts. C is false. D ignores the documented difference.

When you check your answers, note which distinction each miss came from. Make a flashcard for that distinction and drill it spaced out over the next few days instead of rereading the whole section. If you missed one of these questions, the same distinction is worth practicing again in Rycal, where The Global Tapestry deck has flashcards for it and more practice questions use the same kinds of traps.

One-Page Recall Check

Say each answer out loud before you look back, and mark the ones you cannot finish. Anything you cannot say out loud yet belongs in your flashcard deck. In Rycal, add those items to The Global Tapestry deck and let spaced review bring them back over the next few days.

- Explain how the imperial bureaucracy and Confucianism worked together to legitimize Song rule.
- Describe the difference between Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism.
- Name two material causes of Song commercialization and say what each one did.
- Explain what happened politically after the Abbasid Caliphate fragmented.
- Name the three new Islamic political entities and place each one on a map from memory.
- Describe two peaceful ways Islam spread in this period.
- Explain what the House of Wisdom was and why it mattered.
- Contrast Vijayanagara with the Delhi Sultanates.
- Name the three Southeast Asian states and say how each one exercised power.
- Explain the difference between Maya city-states and the Mexica and Inca empires.
- Describe how Great Zimbabwe and the Hausa kingdoms each paid for their states.
- Separate feudalism, the manorial system, and serfdom in one sentence each.
- Explain the Song China versus medieval Europe labor comparison.
- State the Bhakti movement's main idea and how it differed from ritual-centered Hinduism.

Where to go next. Turn every missed item above into flashcards and drill them spaced out over several days rather than in one sitting. In Rycal, open The Global Tapestry deck under AP World History. The deck covers the terms in this guide, and its practice questions target the same traps named here. If you have a test date, add it in the Test Planner. You can also start your next review with a Brain Dump, then check what you missed against this guide.

Key terms for this unit

Song Dynasty of China, imperial bureaucracy, Confucianism, Buddhism, commercialization of the Song economy, free peasant and artisanal labor, Neo-Confucianism, Tibetan Buddhism, Champa rice, Grand Canal, Heian Japan, filial piety, Dar al-Islam, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Abbasid Caliphate, new Islamic political entities, Turkic peoples, Sufis, Islamic intellectual innovations and transfers, Seljuk Empire, Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt, Delhi Sultanates, House of Wisdom, Hinduism, new Hindu and Buddhist states, Bhakti movement, Vijayanagara Empire, Srivijaya Empire, Khmer Empire, Majapahit, Rajput kingdoms, Maya city-states, Mexica, Inca, Cahokia, Great Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Hausa kingdoms, political decentralization in Europe, decentralized monarchies, feudalism, manorial system, serfdom, free and coerced labor.

About this guide. Written for Rycal and aligned to the College Board AP World History course framework, Unit 1, topics 1.1-1.6. All questions and explanations are original Rycal writing. Rycal is independent and is not affiliated with or endorsed by the College Board.

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