

An Incredibly Detailed Map Of Medieval Trade Routes

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The map above is probably the most detailed map of Medieval Trade Routes in Europe, Asia and Africa in the 11th and 12th centuries you can find online. It includes major and minor locations, major and minor routes, sea routes, canals and roads.

Even before modern times the Afro-Eurasian world was already well connected. This map depicts the main trading arteries of the high middle ages, just after the decline of the Vikings and before the rise of the Mongols, the Hansa and well before the Portuguese rounded the Cape of Good Hope.

The map also depicts the general topography, rivers, mountain passes and named routes. All of which contributed to why cities came to be, and still are, up until modern times.

The high middle ages were a time when the stars aligned in terms of commerce for many areas of the world. In central Europe many German and French cities initiated annual trade fairs, some of which are still active today; most notably in Frankfurt. The Europeans have redeveloped a demand for eastern goods as a result of the crusades in Iberia and the Levant. The Italian city states and some north eastern Iberian cities had shipped the crusaders back and forth in the Mediterranean sea, building up huge fleets and setting up networks of trade all around the Mediterranean shores. The Italians frequented ports such as Alexandria, which had separate trading ports for muslim and christian ships.

The Muslim kingdoms of Southern Iberia enjoyed a great trading relationship with Egypt and the most important sea trade route spanned between Seville and Alexandria. On the way between these two cities, Palermo on the island of Sicily became a meeting point between Muslim and christian traders. The Jewish community were a common middleman between the Christians and the Muslims.

This time saw the rise of the Sahelian cities, just south of the Saharan Desert. These cities became the world's leading exporters of gold which stimulated all the markets of Afro-Eurasia. It is from these cities that Mansa Musa (Keita I) would later depart on his famous Hajj. The gold was mainly transported northward to the North African coast across the Saharan Desert. An eastward trade network towards Egypt and Sudan started to grow during this period.

Moving more eastward the Fatimids of Egypt and the Abbasids of Iraq are both trying to funnel the lucrative trade through the Nile and the Euphrates respectively. The Nile would eventually prove to be the better option since the Persian Gulf was starting to get a reputation for its notorious pirates.

In modern Russia, the many navigable rivers are still the main trade channels even after the decline of Viking visits through the area. The Russian area is a big supplier of Fur to both Europe and the muslim kingdoms to the south. These trade routes from Russia all ended up in the starting nodes of the famous and complicated Silk Road.

The Silk Road is not just one, but many roads that leads through all of Asia, from Constantinople in the west, through Central Asia and the Himalayas, to Liangzhou in the east. During this time, the Chinese Song dynasty was in its height and it was one of those Chinese dynasties that were open to foreign trade and invested in commerce and infrastructure. Foreign trade was mostly concentrated to the southern ports where both Jews and Muslims had their own communities.

In the Indonesian region the Srivijaya kingdom based on the Island of Sumatra was the most influential maritime and commercial actor, but it was in strain competition with the other commercial powers based on the neighboring Java island. The Indonesian region provided exotic spices for the muslim and European world.

In India, which has always had a central role in Afro-Eurasian trade as being the main producer of exotic goods and spices, was also on the rise. Especially in the southern part of India the Chola Kingdom started to expand ever more until finally reaching as far as Sumatra. They were a conquering as well as a commercial kingdom, establishing factories and trading networks wherever they conquered.

The last, but equally important as all the other regions, we have East Africa. This region have yet

to see its heyday during this period. But it provided the Indian Ocean countries with gold, slaves and exotic animals. The most notable trade network led from inland Zimbabwean cities to the coastal city of Kilwa, from which most of the African gold were exported.

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