Summary chapter 1

**1500-1600 Age of explorers and reformers**

**1.1**

*Spice of life*

In the Middle Ages, Europe had trading contacts with merchants from the Middle East and North Africa. These merchants traded in products such as silk, precious stones, sugar and also spices. Spices and other exotic wares were also used as a health tonic to make perfume and medicines.

*Caravans from the East*

Spices that came from the east were very expensive. A famous trade route is the Silk Road. This road is stretched all the way from China to the Middle East. On a long route like this, each merchant took care of a section of the journey. When he had completed his section of the route, he sold his products on to another merchant who then did the same. This process was repeated until the products reached the merchants in Europe. The merchants from the Middle East benefited most from this chain of trade.

*Marco Polo*

In the 13th and 14th century, the Mongol Empire was extended from the Black sea until China. The Silk Road became very great and that’s a benefit for the European merchants. Around 1270, the brothers Niccolò and Maffeo Polo decided to cross the Black sea. They arrived at the court of Mongol emperor Kublai Khan. They were received with full honours. Two years later they came back, but then with Niccolò’s son, Marco. They stayed for many years and made voyages through Asia. Accounts of which were later written down by Marco.

*In search of the Indies*

The indies was the name they gave to the area far to the east and southeast of Europe. It covered present-day Asia, particularly southeast Asia, but also included the parts of Africa. Over the land, they could only reach the Indies through hostile Ottoman territory. That’s why they went on sea to the Indies.

**1.2**

*Henry the Navigator*

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to set off on long sea voyages for the purpose of trade. In the 15th century, Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator provided the money and ships to make voyages of discovery. He expected to earn vast trading profits and also wanted to discover the legendary kingdom of Prester John. Prester John was said to be a mighty king who ruled over a prosperous area between the Islamic and pagan empires. Henry the Navigator hoped to find a Christian ally in Prester John. The first explorers left from Portugal. The Canary Island and the Cape Verde islands were discovered. Because the South Atlantic was largely unknown, the sailors kept the coastline in sight. They also began to trade in gold and slaves. All of the information they discovered about the route along the coast of Africa had to be kept secret. In 1488 Bartholomew Diaz rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Vasco da Gama reached India in 1498. This gave Portugal a route to the source of spices: it became known as the Carreira da India.

*The Portuguese in India*

When Vasco da Gama arrived in the Indian city of Calicut, he found Arab merchants there. Vasco da Gama returned home with only a small portion of the goods that he had hoped to find. On the return voyage, thirty crew members died of scurvy, a disease caused by a prolonged lack of vitamin C. The king was pleased and another expedition was planned. The explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral followed the route taken by Vasco da Gama but, sailing too far to the southwest, he discovered Brazil and claimed it in the name of the Portuguese king. They never discovered the kingdom of Prester John.

*Capital*

In the Indies, the Portuguese continually had to fight their way into an existing trading system. Colonization of whole areas was impossible since Portugal did not have enough manpower. However, they succeeded in building a feitoria (a guarded trading post) and in capturing existing settlements on the coast. Portuguese expeditions therefore paved the way for a profitable trading empire. In Europe, the Portuguese became rivals to Turkish and Arab merchants and to Venice, which was the still most important merchant city in Europe. Smart merchants started investing in expeditions to Asia and in the industries associated with them, such as shipbuilding. They tried to make as much profit as possible by investing their capital in international trade. This economic system is known as merchant trade.

**1.3**

*Spain follows Portugal*

The Spaniards also wanted to discover new lands and gain vast profits from trade. That happened in 1492, when there was enough money and time to invest in a new enterprise. That year the Spaniards won their centuries-long struggle against the Islamic presence in the Iberian Peninsula (the Reconquista). The Genoese navigator Christopher Columbus was given Spanish backing for a voyage to discover a sea route to the Indies heading west across the Atlantic. Toscanelli’s map showed that you could reach Asia by crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

*On board the Santa Maria*

Based on the journal that Columbus kept, we can reconstruct life aboard the Santa Maria. Juan de la Cosa was the ship’s owner and the navigator of Columbus. One of the most important duties on board a ship is navigation, determining the course to be maintained. Luis Torres was the interpreter who has been brought along to talk to the locals. Dr Juan Sanchez was examining a wound sustained by one of the cabin boys. Diego de Arana was the weapon master. They had plenty of food, enough to feed the whole crew for one year. Food like dried legumes and cereals, hardtack, salted meat and dried fish. The ship’s holds also contains glass, iron and copper, to exchange or give away. Christobal Caro hopes to find gold and he is a goldsmith.

*The success of Columbus*

In 1492, Columbus departed with three ships. In October of that year, the explorers sighted land. He called the people there ‘Indians’ because he thought he was in the Indies. Columbus named the territory San Salvador, another name for Jesus meaning Holy Redeemer. He wrote about the discovery in his journal. At the end of 1492, Columbus sailed back to Spain to tell the king and queen about his discoveries. Columbus announced that the western route to the Indies had been found and would bring the Spaniards great wealth.

*Around the world with Magellan*

At the beginning of the 16th century, Portuguese sailors discovered the Moluccas and other islands in the Indonesian archipelago. The discovery of the Moluccas led to a dispute with Spain. In the Treaty of Tordesillas, dating from 1494, Portugal and Spain had divided the undiscovered parts of the world between them: everything west of the Cape Verde (island group off the west coast of Africa) would come under Spanish rule. The east would belong to Portugal. After the Portuguese discovered the Moluccas, the Spanish began to have their doubts. Shouldn’t these islands belong to them? Ferdinand Magellan was daring enough to try to reach the islands by sailing to the west and reach them from the other side. On behalf of the German Emperor Charles V, who was also King of Spain, he sailed from the city of Seville in 1519 on an expedition. Antonio Pigafetta wrote an account of the hardships during the voyage.

*Conquistadors*

Once Columbus had made clear the opportunities that lay waiting in the territories he had discovered, adventures crossed the Atlantic to make their fortune. These adventurers were called conquistadors, which means conquerors. They headed into the interior, fought the indigenous peoples and clamed vast tracts of land in name of the Spanish king.

*Aztecs*

Around 1500 Mexico was home to the Aztecs, a people that had subjugated many other people in the 15th century. Trade was very active. In 1519, the Aztecs came into contact with Hernán Cortés. Cortés had crossed Cuba to the mainland of South America with 500 soldiers. The Aztecs received him with great reverence. In 1521, the Spaniards conquered the Aztecs with military force.

*Incas*

In the west of South America was home to another great empire. It belonged to the Incas, a civilization that had emerged in mountainous Andes region from the 13th century. Their empire stretched from Equador deep into Chile. The Incas had established a communication system. They had paved roads up to 15,000 kilometres long. These roads were used by couriers that travelled through the country delivering messages and orders from the administrative centre of Cusco. The roads were also used by armies. The Incas believed in life after that and regarded the sun and the moon as gods. The sun god was called Inti.

*Pizarro defeats the Inca Empire*

Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro first came into contact with the Incas in 1526. The Spaniards say many expensive things. Pizarro was eager to conquer the territory and demanded to meet Atahualpa, the Inca leader. Atahualpa hoped that the Spaniards would keep the peace. Pizarro took Atahualpa prisoner. He forced the Inca to tell him where he had hidden his gold. Atahualpa was eventually killed and Pizarro conquered the entire Inca Empire with little resistance.

**1.4**

*Colonization*

Once the Spaniards discovered and conquered large parts of the New World, they founded colonies there. The most successful conquistadors and army officers, who settled in Hispanic America, received a fief from the Spanish king. This was known as an encomienda. The Spanish liegeman, the encomendero, was allowed to raise taxes and make the indigenous people work for him a few days a week. The indigenous people were put to work on the large estates owned by the Spaniards, the haciendas. Cerro de Potosí was discovered in 1545 (silver mine).

*The treatment of the indigenous peoples*

The indigenous people were often treated badly and tried to flee. Sometimes they succeed, but often than not they were tracked down and horribly punished. Mistreatment caused fatalities among the indigenous population. Criticism of the encomienda system and the treatment of the indigenous population, voiced by the Spanish priest Bartolomé de Las Casas and others, let in 1542 to the New Laws. When the slave ships were unloaded and then filled with products from the plantations before sailing for Europe. From there the ships transported weapons, ammunition alcohol and textiles to Africa, where new slaves were bought. This system is called the transatlantic slave trade or triangular slave trade.

*Social changes*

A change was that the racial mixing between the indigenous peoples, the Spaniards and the Africans. Relationships between men and women led to a mixed culture, a process known as miscegenation. The children of a European-indigenous couple were called mestizo, those of an African-European couple were called mulatto and those of an indigenous-African couple were called zambo. It was a society in which your ancestry and skin colour determined your position.

**1.4**

*Charles V’s global empire*

In the early 16th century, Emperor Charles V ruled the largest empire in Europe. In 1519, German princes gave him the title Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Between 1550 and 1560 the Spanish treasure fleet returned with tons of gold and silver, one fifth went straight into royal coffers. It made the Spanish monarchy the wealthiest in Europe.

*Wars in Europe*

Charles V’s main enemy in Europe was the French King Francis I. In the 1520s they fought two major wars. The fighting took place in Italy. Charles finally won thanks to his victory at the Battle of Pavia, in 1525. In 1529 Charles V defeated the Turks before the gates of Vienna. When he went on to take Tunis on the north coast of Africa in 1535, he brought the Turkish advance to a halt.

*Economic impact*

There was an increase in the amount of Spanish money in circulation and this lowered the value of the Spanish coins, the most popular method of payment among European merchants in the mid of the 16th century. This led to currency depreciation and prices rose.

Merchant capitalists: merchants who invest in trade with distant territories to maximize profits.

*A changing world*

Read it by yourself