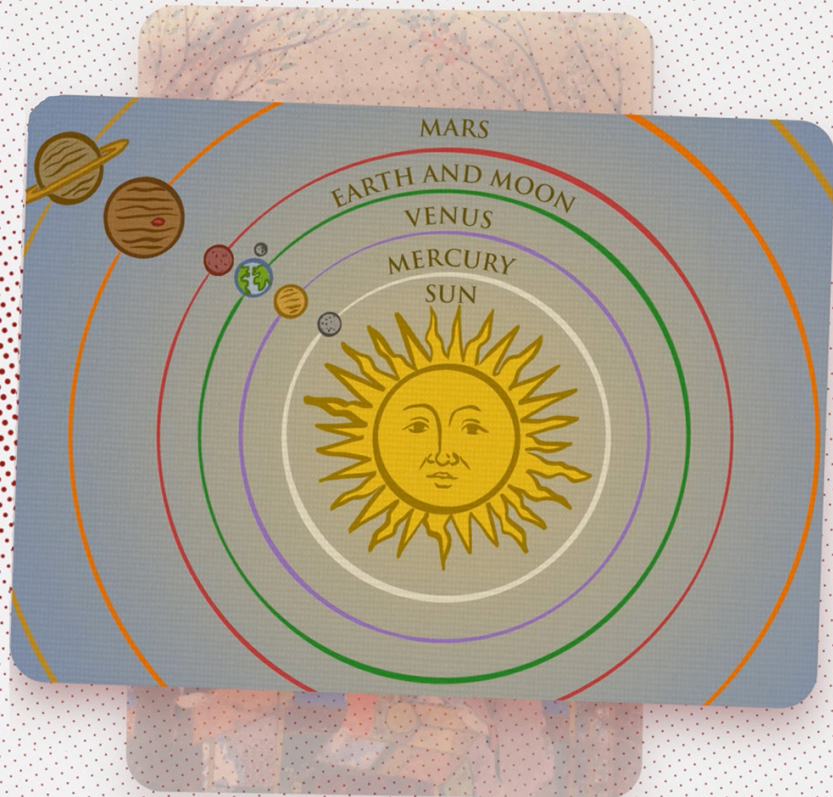




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WHP AP Unit 1 Overview | World History Project

The world of 1200 CE was a world of astounding diversity, and it was a world on the verge of some huge transformations. The global tapestry included societies from vastly different regions of the globe, many of which were completely disconnected from each other. Still, among all these differences, we can identify many similarities that connected the human experience across the globe. This overview video introduces the world in 1200 CE along with some of the brilliant scholars of the Islamic Golden Age.

0:13

Images of people riding horses and donkeys.

Illustration of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.

Course timeline graphic.

Anyone who knows, and knows that he knows, Makes the steed of intelligence leap over the vault of heaven. Anyone who does not know, but knows that he does not know, Can bring his lame little donkey to the destination nonetheless. Anyone who does not know, and does not know that he does not know Is stuck for ever in double ignorance.

That's a poem attributed to the thirteenth-century Persian scholar, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. You're going to encounter him—and a lot of other people, events, religions, empires, and other stuff—in this unit and in this course.

After all, we've got 800 years and one whole world to learn about!

Now, if you're like me, you don't know everything But like the poem said, that's not a big deal. This is only Unit 1, and we're just getting started.

Also if you're like me, you know that you don't know everything. So, let's follow al-Tusi's advice, hop on our little donkey and head out to our destination: the world from 1200 to 1450 CE.

First, let's address one thing you probably don't know: Who's Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, and why did I am talking about him?

Well, have you ever wondered how we know that the Earth revolves around the Sun, or why you have to go to chemistry and math class? Or how we know what makes our eyes work, and how to make glasses? Part of the answer to that is: Because of Islamic scholars like al-Tusi. He was one of the many scholars working during what historians call the "Islamic Golden Age." It lasted from the eighth century all the way to the fourteenth.

During this period, scholars like al-Tusi made incredible advances in fields like astronomy, mathematics, medicine, literature, and chemistry. Their progress in these fields was so remarkable that much of our modern scientific knowledge is descended from their work.

Exploring the histories of Al-Tusi and the Islamic Golden Age can help us understand some important connections between the themes of Governance, Technology and Innovation, and Cultural Developments and Interactions. How? Well, my fellow donkey riders, let's find out together.

Hi, I'm Rachel Hansen, and this is Unit 1: The Global Tapestry 1200 to 1450 CE. In each unit of this course, you'll see either me or my fellow teacher John Arthur in one of these thematic overview videos.

You've probably met us before— we were in the Themes overview video at the start of the course, so we're pretty famous. In that video, we introduced the six themes of the course.

Here in these unit overview videos, we'll show you how to use those themes to explore the big narratives of world history from 1200 CE to the present.

1:07

Illustrations of people with donkeys.

Illustration of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi

Illustrations of the solar system and early medical texts.

Illustrations of scholars studying.

2:12

Governance, Technology and Innovation, and Cultural Developments and Interaction theme graphics.

Video clip of John Author and thematic overview

Graphics of course themes.

3:09

In each video, we'll use one historical example—like al-Tusi and the Islamic Golden Age—to help illustrate something about our six themes. But we'll also provide a quick overview of the big historical developments in each unit to help you develop your narrative of the past 800 years of history.

Let's begin where this course does: in the year 1200 CE. There's nothing particularly special about that year.

So if you're asking "why start a course in 1200?"—it's a fair question.

Some world history courses begin in 1500, when the two biggest landmasses of the world—Afro-Eurasia and the Americas—connected into the first sustained global system. Other courses start much earlier. But we think 1200 makes sense.

Here's why: Starting our global story in 1200 allows us to explore something important: a rich tapestry of countless diverse communities stretching across our globe. Many of these communities were disconnected from those in distant places. The year 1200 shows us the world before the great linkages and accelerations of the modern era. The world from 1200 to 1450 was very different from our own, but it was a world on the verge of great changes. We think that you'll be able to understand those changes better, if you understand what the world looked like before they started.

Because Afro-Eurasia, the Americas, and the landmasses of Oceania were not yet connected in 1200, the world in Unit 1 was a world of astounding diversity. The ways that people lived, their beliefs, foods, fashions, and so many other aspects of life wove a diverse global tapestry.

5:05

So, in Unit 1, we'll hop from one region of the world to the next, exploring the many ways that societies governed and organized themselves as well as some of the shared culture that crossed physical and political barriers. We'll ask how states formed and how they collapsed in this period. Belief systems like Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam spread, creating similarities across borders. Yet, in each instance, local conditions and distance ensured great variation in experiences.

As a result, a Polynesian sailor in the Pacific Ocean lived in a very different world from an Aztec merchant, a Chinese bureaucrat, a scholar in Timbuktu, or a French peasant. To be sure, there were long-distance networks linking humanity. Still, large regions of the world remained disconnected from others.

5:57

In this unit, we'll compare the different ways that human societies governed themselves. Our focus will be on how states expanded, governed, and collapsed. But we'll also see how governing strategies interacted with technological, economic, social, and cultural developments. As a result, we'll see some very different governing strategies emerge, but we'll also see similarities between regions and continuity over time.

Images and videos of different historical periods.

4:01
Illustrations of communities in 1200.

Illustrations of different historical communities and lifestyles.

Graphic of course themes.

Illustration of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi.

Here's an example of what we're talking about:

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was born in 1201 CE. He witnessed some of the transformative events you'll encounter in this unit, such as the Mongol invasions of Persia.

Illustrations of a Mongol Khan and astronomers.

In fact, one Mongol Khan hired al-Tusi as an advisor and funded a grand astronomical observatory in which al-Tusi could study the stars. Al-Tusi wrote hundreds of books on topics like mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and religion. While he worked at the observatory, he made detailed charts of planetary movements.

7:03

Images of the Tusi couple and the heliocentric model of the solar system.

During the Islamic Golden Age, centuries of scholars developed new knowledge and innovations in many different fields. And, if you're familiar with the names "Aristotle", "Plato", or "Socrates", you should thank the Islamic Golden Age. It was Islamic scholars who preserved, translated, and improved on the ideas of the ancient Greeks.

And who do we have to thank for the work of these scholars? Well, just as today's great thinkers are granted funding by powerful institutions, the Islamic Golden Age's sultans, caliphs, Khans, and other rulers valued and paid for all this innovation.

Science ain't cheap!

Illustrations of scholars studying

So, why would rulers fund something like astronomy? I mean, they weren't planning to launch any rockets to the moon!

8:07

Images of the results of astronomical study.

So, why would rulers fund something like astronomy? I mean, they weren't planning to launch any rockets to the moon!

But astronomy—like medicine, history, architecture, mathematics, and the other forms of knowledge funded by Islamic empires—benefited the state. For example, by measuring the movement of the Sun, Moon, and stars, Muslim scientists helped determine the correct times for daily prayers, set the dates for the lunar calendar, and precisely calculated the direction of Mecca from any location. This knowledge was valuable to political and religious leaders in the Islamic World. And as for al-Tusi, the Mongol Khans believed that reading the stars could predict the future and provide guidance on government policies.

8:56

Course themes graphics.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and the other scholars of the Islamic Golden Age provide us a window into the world of 1200 to 1450—a world of changes and continuities, similarities and differences. It highlights some important linkages between the Governance, Cultural Developments and Interactions, and Technology and Innovation themes that you'll encounter in this unit.



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