

The Age of Exploration

Europe's Motives for Exploration

The peoples of Europe were, for many centuries, much less technologically and scientifically advanced than their neighbors in the Middle East or faraway cultures such as China. This would change in the 1400s. But until the 1400s, the Europeans' geographical knowledge and understanding of the world was limited. They knew the Mediterranean well, and were familiar with the Baltic and North Seas. But Africa, the Middle East, Asia and even Russia were unknown, inaccessible, or impassable.

The Europeans' primary motive for exploring the world was economic. During the Middle Ages, the nations of Europe had become aware of the fabulous wealth of other parts of the world, especially the east. Mediterranean trade, greater knowledge about the Middle East gained from the Crusades, and the tales of Marco Polo all whetted the Europeans' appetites for the wealth of far off places such as China, the Indies and Japan. The Europeans were dreaming of silk, metal goods, spices, fruits, jewels and precious metals all of which were in short supply in Europe. The Europeans began to look for faster and more convenient trade routes to the east.

1. What were the Europeans' motives for exploration?

New Navigational and Maritime Technology

The Europeans were developing the technology and knowledge to improve sailing long before they began to explore. The Europeans had learned how to make the compass from the Chinese. This allowed them to sail accurate courses on expeditions. They also had better knowledge of the stars and better navigational tools, such as the astrolabe which was used to determine the altitude of the sun and the sextant, which determined latitude and longitude. These tools allowed Europeans to sail farther than ever before without getting lost.

Naval technology improved as well. It was during the 1300s and 1400s that the Europeans began to build larger and longer ships. Larger ships can carry a larger food supply, and ships with longer hulls can sail much faster. This plus more advanced systems of sails and rigging allowed ships to travel in almost any direction their captains wanted to go, even if the wind was not favorable.

Finally, European nations were beginning to incorporate gunpowder weapons into their armies and navies during the 1300s and 1400s. Europeans sailors and soldiers came equipped with muskets, pistols and small artillery pieces. Not only could they use gunpowder weapons at sea, but, perhaps more importantly, European explorers and conquerors would be able to use them against less technologically advanced native populations when they reached new lands.

1. List the new inventions of the Age of Exploration and explain why they are important.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

The Portuguese and Spanish Explorers

Henry the Navigator is responsible for helping promote exploration. He created a maritime center and navigation school that trained sailors. From there, he and the princes who followed him sent out many voyages west and south, attempting to find a sea route to India and the Far East to bypass the Middle Eastern traders. They also traveled down the western coast of Africa, conquering as well as

exploring. The Portuguese continued to expand along Africa's western shore until 1488. That year a Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Diaz reached what became the Cape of Good Hope.

By the end of the 1490s, then, the Spanish and the Portuguese had two worlds to explore and conquer. The Portuguese continued to sail eastward to India, from the southern tip of Africa. In 1497, Vasco da Gama became the first European explorer to reach India by sea. He returned in 1499 with his ships full of cargo. The profit from the voyage equaled sixty times the original investment, indicating how lucrative the business of exploration was.

Shortly thereafter, the Portuguese captain Ferdinand Magellan, sailing for Spain, led an expedition to circumnavigate the globe. Magellan attempted to do so in 1519. His fleet sailed across the Atlantic, around the southern tip of South America and made their way to the Pacific. Although Magellan himself died in the Philippine Islands, his ships did reach India, then sailed to Africa and then back to Europe in 1522. This was the first circumnavigation of the globe.

In the meantime, the Spanish had to play catch up with the Portuguese. In order to do so, they would have to try something completely different. The result was the famous voyage of Italian captain Christopher Columbus in 1492, sponsored by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Columbus proposed to sail west across the Atlantic to reach China and India. He believed that the world was small enough to cross it and create a trading empire in the East. Columbus set sail in August 1492, and his ships reached the islands of the Caribbean on October 12, 1492. The European encounter with the "New World" changed the history of the world.

The Spanish and Portuguese knew that Columbus had discovered a new land, but Columbus firmly believed until his death that he found the Indies. The New World became known as the Americas, named after Amerigo Vespucci who charted and mapped the New World. The Spanish and Portuguese now had to lay claim to the New World. The Pope interjected and at the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, Spain received all lands west of the Cape Verde Islands, which consisted of almost all of the New World. Portugal received India, Africa and Brazil.

1. List the achievements of these explorers.
 - a. Henry the Navigator
 - b. Bartolomeu Diaz
 - c. Vasco de Gama
 - d. Magellan
 - e. Columbus

The Dutch Explorations

By the 1590s the Dutch began exploring and started to seize overseas colonies from the Portuguese. They slowly began to build an overseas empire located in the Far East. To control this they created the Dutch East India Company which regulated trade between Dutch colonies. The Dutch were also involved in colonizing North America as well. In 1609 they commissioned the English sailor Henry Hudson to explore and seize the North Eastern part of North America, and also purchased the island of Manhattan from Native Americans, which became New Amsterdam. The English would eventually conquer the Dutch in New Amsterdam and rename it New York

1. How did the Dutch impact exploration in the Far East and North America?

Letter addressed to the noble Lord Raphael Sanchez, Treasurer to their most invincible Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, King and Queen of Spain, by Christopher Columbus, to whom our age is greatly indebted, treating of the islands of India recently discovered beyond the Ganges, to explore which he had been sent eight months before under the auspices and at the expense of their said Majesties.

Thirty-three days after my departure from Cadiz I reached the Indian sea, where I discovered many islands, thickly peopled, of which I took possession without resistance in the name of our most illustrious Monarch, by public proclamation and with unfurled banners. To the first of these islands...I gave the name of the blessed Savior (San Salvador), relying upon whose protection I had reached this as well as the other islands; to each of these I also gave a name, ordering that one should be called Fernandina, and another Isabella.

The inhabitants of both sexes in this island, and in all the others which I have seen go always naked as they were born, with the exception of some of the women, who use the covering of a leaf, or an apron of cotton which they prepare for that purpose. None of them, as I have already said, are possessed of any iron, neither have they weapons...and are timid and full of fear. They carry however in lieu of arms, canes dried in the sun, on the ends of which they fix heads of dried wood sharpened to a point, and even these they dare not use habitually; for it has often occurred when I have sent two or three of my men to any of the villages to speak with the natives, that they have come out in a disorderly troop, and have fled in such haste at the approach of our men. This timidity did not arise from any loss or injury that they had received from us; for, on the contrary, I gave to all I approached whatever articles I had about me, such as cloth and many other things, taking nothing of theirs in return: but they are naturally timid and fearful. As soon however as they see that they are safe, and have laid aside all fear, they are very simple and honest, and exceedingly liberal with all they have; none of them refusing any thing he may possess when he is asked for it, but on the contrary inviting us to ask them. They exhibit great love towards all others in preference to themselves: they also give objects of great value for trifles, and content themselves with very little or nothing in return. I however forbid that these trifles and articles of no value (such as pieces of dishes, plates, and glass, keys, and leather straps) should be given to them, although if they could obtain them, they imagined themselves to be possessed of the most beautiful trinkets in the world. Thus they bartered, like idiots, cotton and gold for fragments of bows, glasses, bottles, and jars.

Finally, to compress into few words the entire summary of my voyage and speedy return, and of the advantages derivable therefrom, I promise, that with a little assistance afforded me by our most invincible sovereigns, I will procure them as much gold as they need, as great a quantity of spices, of cotton, and as many men for the service of the navy as their Majesties may require... Let Christ rejoice on earth, as he rejoices in heaven in the prospect of the salvation of the souls of so many nations hitherto lost. Let us also rejoice, as well on account of the exaltation of our faith, as on account of the increase of our temporal prosperity, of which not only Spain, but all Christendom will be partakers.

1. How does Columbus describe the Native Americans he encounters?
2. Describe the bartering system used by the Spanish and Native Americans.
3. After reading this document, what are the main purposes of the Spanish voyages to the New World?