
UNIT 4 : MOTIVES, VOYAGES AND EXPLORATIONS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to;

- explain the reasons for the European excursion to the New World,
- know different routes discovered during the explorations, and
- effects of Europe's global exploration.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the early fifteenth century, European states began to embark on a series of global explorations that inaugurated a new chapter in world history. Known as the Age of Discovery, or the Age of Exploration, this period spanned the fifteenth through the early seventeenth century, during which time European expansion to places such as the Americas, Africa, and the Far East flourished. This era is defined by figures such as Ferdinand Magellan, whose 1519–1522 expedition was the first to traverse the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean and the first to circumnavigate the globe.

The European Age of Exploration developed alongside the Renaissance. Both periods in Western history acted as transitional moments between the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Competition between burgeoning European empires, such as Spain and England, fuelled the evolution and advancement of overseas exploration. Motivated by religion, profit, and power, the size and influence of European empires during this period expanded greatly. The effects of exploration were not only felt abroad but also within the geographic confines of Europe itself. The economic, political, and cultural effects of Europe's beginning stages of global

exploration impacted the long term development of both European society and the entire world.

4.2 CAUSE FOR EUROPEAN EXPLORATION

During the eighth century, the Islamic conquest of North Africa, Spain, France, and parts of the Mediterranean, effectively impeded European travel to the Far East for subsequent centuries. This led many early explorers, such as Vasco de Gama and Christopher Columbus, to search for new trade routes to the East. Previous travel accounts from the early expeditions of figures such as Marco Polo (during the late thirteenth century) encouraged many Europeans to search for new territories and places that would lead to the East. Ocean voyages were extremely treacherous during the beginnings of European exploration. The navigation techniques were primitive, the maps were notoriously unreliable, and the weather was unpredictable. Additionally, explorers worried about running out of supplies, rebellion on the high seas, and hostile indigenous peoples. The Spanish and Portuguese were some of the first European states to launch overseas voyages of exploration. There were several factors that led to the Iberian place in the forefront of global exploration. The first involved its strategic geographic location, which provided easy access to venturing south toward Africa or west toward the Americas. The other, arguably more important, factor for Spain and Portugal's leading position in overseas exploration was these countries' acquisition and application of ancient Arabic knowledge and expertise in math, astronomy, and geography. The principal political actors throughout the Age of Exploration were Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, England, and France. Certain European states, primarily Portugal and The Netherlands, were primarily interested in building empires based on global trade and commerce. These states established worldwide trading posts and the necessary components for developing a successful economic infrastructure. Other European powers, Spain and England in particular, decided to conquer and colonize the new territories they discovered. This was particularly evident in North and South America, where these two powers built extensive political, religious, and social infrastructure.

Before the fifteenth century, European states enjoyed a long history of trade with places in the Far East, such as India and China. This trade introduced luxury goods such as cotton, silk, and spices to the European economy. New technological advancements in maritime navigation and ship construction allowed Europeans to travel farther and explore parts of the globe that were previously unknown. This, in turn, provided Europeans with an opportunity to locate luxury goods, which were in high demand, thereby eliminating Europe's dependency on Eastern trade. In many ways, the demand for goods such as sugar, cotton, and rum fueled the expansion of European empires and their eventual use of slave labor from Africa. Europe's demand for luxury goods greatly influenced the course of the transatlantic slave trade. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries small groups financed by private businesses carried out the first phase of European exploration. Members of the noble

or merchant class typically funded these early expeditions. Over time, as it became clear that global exploration was extremely profitable, European states took on a primary role. The next phase of exploration involved voyages taken in the name of a particular empire and monarch (e.g., France or Spain). The Iberian empires of Spain and Portugal were some of the earliest states to embark on new voyages of exploration. In addition to seeking luxury goods, the Spanish empire was driven by its quest for American silver.

The period of European exploration introduced the people of Europe to the existence of new cultures worldwide. Before the fifteenth century, Europeans had minimal knowledge of the people and places beyond the boundaries of Europe, particularly Africa and Asia. Before the discovery of the Americas, Europeans did not even know of its existence. Europeans presumed that the world was much smaller than it was in actuality. This led early explorers such as Columbus and Magellan to believe that finding new routes to the Far East would be much easier than it turned out to be. Profound misconceptions about geography and the cultures of local populations would change very slowly throughout the early centuries of European exploration. By the sixteenth century, European maps started to expand their depictions and representations to include new geographic discoveries. However, due to the intense political rivalries during the period, European states guarded their geographic knowledge and findings from one another. With the growth of the printing press during the sixteenth century, accounts of overseas travels, such as those of Marco Polo in the late thirteenth century, spread to a wider audience of European readers than had previously been possible. The Age of Exploration also coincided with the development of Humanism and a growing intellectual curiosity about the natural world. The collection and study of exotic materials such as plants and animals led to a new age of scientific exploration and inquiry. These initial surveys and analyses influenced future revolutionary developments in numerous fields of science and natural history in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

One of the tenets of Catholicism decreed that Christianity ought to be the universal religion and faith among all mankind. The Crusades in the centuries preceding the Age of Exploration exposed Europeans to new places, people, and goods. It also reflected the zealous nature of medieval Christianity and foreshadowed the fervent missionary work that would form a major part of all early global expeditions. The pope played an important and validating role in these voyages by sanctioning and encouraging worldwide exploration. This often included the approbation of enslaving Africans and indigenous peoples. Missionaries were frequently a part of the early expeditions of Spain with the aim of bringing Christianity to the native inhabitants. Europeans typically viewed indigenous populations as barbaric heathens who could only become civilized through the adoption of Christianity.

4.3 THE SEA ROUTE EAST BY SOUTH TO CATHAY

Henry the Navigator, prince of Portugal, initiated the first great enterprise of the Age of Discovery—the search for a sea route east by south to Cathay. His motives were mixed. He was curious about the world; he was interested in new navigational aids and better ship design and was eager to test them; he was also a Crusader and hoped that, by sailing south and then east along the coast of Africa, Arab power in North Africa could be attacked from the rear. The promotion of profitable trade was yet another motive; he aimed to divert the Guinea trade in gold and ivory away from its routes across the Sahara to the Moors of Barbary (North Africa) and instead channel it via the sea route to Portugal.

Expedition after expedition was sent forth throughout the 15th century to explore the coast of Africa. In 1445 the Portuguese navigator Dinís Dias reached the mouth of the Sénégal, which “men say comes from the Nile, being one of the most glorious rivers of Earth, flowing from the Garden of Eden and the earthly paradise.” Once the desert coast had been passed, the sailors pushed on: in 1455 and 1456 Alvise Ca’ da Mosto made voyages to Gambia and the Cape Verde Islands. Prince Henry died in 1460 after a career that had brought the colonization of the Madeira Islands and the Azores and the traversal of the African coast to Sierra Leone. Henry’s captain, Diogo Cão, discovered the Congo River in 1482. All seemed promising; trade was good with the riverine peoples, and the coast was trending hopefully eastward. Then the disappointing fact was realized: the head of a great gulf had been reached, and, beyond, the coast seemed to stretch endlessly southward. Yet, when Columbus sought backing for his plan to sail westward across the Atlantic to the Indies, he was refused—“seeing that King John II [of Portugal] ordered the coast of Africa to be explored with the intention of going by that route to India.”

King John II sought to establish two routes: the first, a land and sea route through Egypt and Ethiopia to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and, the second, a sea route around the southern shores of Africa, the latter an act of faith, since Ptolemy’s map showed a landlocked Indian Ocean. In 1487, a Portuguese emissary, Pêro da Covilhã, successfully followed the first route; but, on returning to Cairo, he reported that, in order to travel to India, the Portuguese “could navigate by their coasts and the seas of Guinea.” In the same year, another Portuguese navigator, Bartolomeu Dias, found encouraging evidence that this was so. In 1487 he rounded the Cape of Storms in such bad weather that he did not see it, but he satisfied himself that the coast was now trending northeastward; before turning back, he reached the Great Fish River, in what is now South Africa. On the return voyage, he sighted the Cape and set up a pillar upon it to mark its discovery.

The seaway was now open, but eight years were to elapse before it was exploited. In 1492 Columbus had apparently reached the East by a much easier route. By the end of the decade, however, doubts of the validity of Columbus’s claim were current. Interest was therefore renewed in establishing the sea route south by east to the

known riches of India. In 1497 a Portuguese captain, Vasco da Gama, sailed in command of a fleet under instructions to reach Calicut (Kozhikode), on India's west coast. This he did after a magnificent voyage around the Cape of Storms (which he renamed the Cape of Good Hope) and along the unknown coast of East Africa. Yet another Portuguese fleet set out in 1500, this one being under the command of Pedro Álvarez Cabral; on the advice of da Gama, Cabral steered southwestward to avoid the calms of the Guinea coast; thus, en route for Calicut, Brazil was discovered. Soon trading depots, known as factories, were built along the African coast, at the strategic entrances to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and along the shores of the Indian peninsula. In 1511 the Portuguese established a base at Malacca (now Melaka, Malaysia), commanding the straits into the China Sea; in 1511 and 1512, the Moluccas, or Spice Islands, and Java were reached; in 1557 the trading port of Macau was founded at the mouth of the Canton River. Europe had arrived in the East. It was in the end the Portuguese, not the Turks, who destroyed the commercial supremacy of the Italian cities, which had been based on a monopoly of Europe's trade with the East by land. But Portugal was soon overextended; it was therefore the Dutch, the English, and the French who in the long run reaped the harvest of Portuguese enterprise.

Some idea of the knowledge that these trading explorers brought to the common store may be gained by a study of contemporary maps. The map of the German Henricus Martellus, published in 1492, shows the shores of North Africa and of the Gulf of Guinea more or less correctly and was probably taken from numerous seamen's charts. The delineation of the west coast of southern Africa from the Guinea Gulf to the Cape suggests a knowledge of the charts of the expedition of Bartolomeu Dias. The coastlines of the Indian Ocean are largely Ptolemaic with two exceptions: first, the Indian Ocean is no longer landlocked; and second, the Malay Peninsula is shown twice—once according to Ptolemy and once again, presumably, according to Marco Polo. The Contarini map of 1506 shows further advances; the shape of Africa is generally accurate, and there is new knowledge of the Indian Ocean, although it is curiously treated. Peninsular India (on which Cananor and Calicut are named) is shown; although too small, it is, however, recognizable. There is even an indication to the east of it of the Bay of Bengal, with a great river running into it. Eastward of this is Ptolemy's India, with the huge island of Taprobane—a muddled representation of the Indian peninsula and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). East again, as on the map of Henricus Martellus, the Malay Peninsula appears twice. Ptolemy's bonds were hard to break.

4.4 THE SEA ROUTE WEST TO CATHAY

It is not known when the idea originated of sailing westward in order to reach Cathay. Many sailors set forth searching for islands in the west; and it was a commonplace among scientists that the east could be reached by sailing west, but to believe this a practicable voyage was an entirely different matter. Christopher

Columbus, a Genoese who had settled in Lisbon about 1476, argued that Cipango lay a mere 2,500 nautical miles west of the Canary Islands in the eastern Atlantic. He took 45 instead of 60 nautical miles as the value of a degree; he accepted Ptolemy's exaggerated west–east extent of Asia and then added to it the lands described by Marco Polo, thus reducing the true distance between the Canaries and Cipango by about onethird. He could not convince the Portuguese scientists nor the merchants of Lisbon that his idea was worth backing; but eventually he obtained the support of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. The sovereigns probably argued that the cost of equipping the expedition would not be very great; the loss, if it failed, could be borne; the gain, should it succeed, was incalculable—indeed, it might divert to Spain all the wealth of Asia.

On August 3, 1492, Columbus sailed from Palos, Spain, with three small ships manned by Spaniards. From the Canaries he sailed westward, for, on the evidence of the globes and maps in which he had faith, Japan was on the same latitude. If Japan should be missed, Columbus thought that the route adopted would land him, only a little further on, on the coast of China itself. Fair winds favoured him, the sea was calm, and, on October 12, landfall was made on the Bahama island of Guanahaní, which he renamed San Salvador (also called Watling Island, though Samana Cay and other islands have been identified as Guanahaní). With the help of the local Indians, the ships reached Cuba and then Haiti. Although there was no sign of the wealth of the lands of Kublai Khan, Columbus nevertheless seemed convinced that he had reached China, since, according to his reckoning, he was beyond Japan. A second voyage in 1493 and 1494, searching fruitlessly for the court of Kublai Khan, further explored the islands of “the Indies.” Doubts seem to have arisen among the would-be colonists as to the identity of the islands since Columbus demanded that all take an oath that Cuba was the southeast promontory of Asia—the Golden Chersonese. On his third voyage, in 1498, Columbus sighted Trinidad, entered the Gulf of Paria, on the coast of what is now Venezuela, and annexed for Spain “a very great continent...until today unknown.” On a fourth voyage, from 1502 to 1504, he explored the coast of Central America from Honduras to Darien on the Isthmus of Panama, seeking a navigable passage to the west. What passage he had in mind is obscure; if at this point he still believed he had reached Asia, it is conceivable that he sought a way through Ptolemy's Golden Chersonese into the Indian Ocean.

Columbus's tenacity, courage, and skill in navigation make him stand out among the few explorers who have changed substantially ideas about the world. At the time, however, his efforts must have seemed ill-rewarded: he found no emperor's court rich in spices, silks, gold, or precious stones but had to contend with mutinous sailors, dissident colonists, and disappointed sovereigns. He died at Valladolid in 1506. Did he believe to the end that he indeed had reached Cathay, or did he, however dimly, perceive that he had found a New World? Whatever Columbus thought, it was clear to others that there was much to be investigated, and probably much to be gained, by exploration westward. Not only in Lisbon and Cádiz but also

in other Atlantic ports, groups of men congregated in hopes of joining in the search. In England, Bristol, with its western outlook and Icelandic trade, was the port best placed to nurture adventurous seamen. In the latter part of the 15th century, John Cabot, with his wife and three sons, came to Bristol from Genoa or Venice. His project to sail west gained support, and with one small ship, the *Matthew*, he set out in May 1497, taking a course due west from Dursey Head, Ireland. His landfall on the other side of the ocean was probably on the northern peninsula of what is now known as Newfoundland. From there, Cabot explored southward, perhaps encouraged to do so, even if seeking a westward passage, by ice in the Strait of Belle Isle. Little is known of John Cabot's first voyage, and almost nothing of his second, in 1498, from which he did not return, but his voyages in high latitudes represented almost as great a navigational feat as those of Columbus.

The coasts between the landfalls of Columbus and of John Cabot were charted in the first quarter of the 16th century by Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese sailors. Sebastian Cabot, son of John, gained a great reputation as a navigator and promoter of Atlantic exploration, but whether this was based primarily on his own experience or on the achievements of his father is uncertain. In 1499 Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian merchant living in Sevilla (Seville), together with the Spanish explorer Alonso de Ojeda, explored the north coast of South America from Suriname to the Golfo de Venezuela. His lively and embellished description of these lands became popular, and Waldseemüller, on his map of 1507, gave the name America to the southern part of the continent.

The 1506 map of Contarini represented a brave attempt to collate the mass of new information, true and false, that accrued from these western voyages. The land explored by Columbus on his third voyage and by Vespucci and de Ojeda in 1499 is shown at the bottom left of the map as a promontory of a great northern bulge of a continent extending far to the south. The northeast coast of Asia at the top left is pulled out into a great peninsula on which is shown a big river and some mountains representing Contarini's concept of Newfoundland and the lands found by the Cabots and others. In the wide sea that separates these northern lands from South America, the West Indies are shown. Halfway between the Indies and the coast of Asia, Japan is drawn. A legend placed between Japan and China reveals the state of opinion among at least some contemporary geographers; it presumably refers to the fourth voyage of Columbus in 1502 and may be an addition to the map. It runs:

Christopher Columbus, Viceroy of Spain, sailing westwards, reached the Spanish islands after many hardships and dangers. Weighing anchor thence he sailed to the province called Ciambra (a province which then adjoined Cochinchina).

Others did not agree with Contarini's interpretation. To more and more people it was becoming plain that a New World had been found, although for a long time there was little inclination to explore it but instead a great determination to find a way past

it to the wealth of Asia. The voyage of the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan, from 1519 to 1521, dispelled two long-cherished illusions: first, that there was an easy way through the barrier and, second, that, once the barrier was passed, Cathay was near at hand.

Ferdinand Magellan had served in the East Indies as a young man. Familiar with the long sea route to Asia eastward from Europe via the Cape of Good Hope, he was convinced that there must be an easier sea route westward. His plan was in accord with Spanish hopes; five Spanish ships were fitted out in Sevilla, and in August 1519 they sailed under his command first to the Cape Verde Islands and thence to Brazil. Standing offshore, they then sailed southward along the east coast of South America; the estuary of the Río de la Plata was explored in the vain hope that it might prove to be a strait leading to the Pacific. Magellan's ships then sailed south along the coast of Patagonia. The Gulf of St. George, and doubtless many more small embayments, raised hopes that a strait had been found, only to dash them; at last at Port Julian, at 49°15' S, winter quarters were established. In September 1520 a southward course was set once more, until, finally, on October 21, Magellan found a strait leading westward. It proved to be an extremely difficult one: it was long, deep, tortuous, rock-walled, and bedevilled by icy squalls and dense fogs. It was a miracle that three of the five ships got through its 325-mile (525-km) length. After 38 days, they sailed out into the open ocean. Once away from land, the ocean seemed calm enough; Magellan consequently named it the Pacific. The Pacific, however, proved to be of vast extent, and for 14 weeks the little ships sailed on a northwesterly course without encountering land. Short of food and water, the sailors ate sawdust mixed with ship's biscuits and chewed the leather parts of their gear to keep themselves alive. At last, on March 6, 1521, exhausted and scurvy-ridden, they landed at the island of Guam. Ten days later they reached the Philippines, where Magellan was killed in a local quarrel. The survivors, in two ships, sailed on to the Moluccas; thus, sailing westward, they arrived at last in territory already known to the Portuguese sailing eastward. One ship attempted, but failed, to return across the Pacific. The remaining ship, the *Vittoria*, laden with spices, under the command of the Spanish navigator Juan Sebastián del Cano, sailed alone across the Indian Ocean, rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and arrived at Sevilla on September 9, 1522, with a crew of four Indians and only 17 survivors of the 239 Europeans who had set sail with the expedition three years earlier. Cano, not having allowed for the fact that his circumnavigation had caused him to lose a day, was greatly puzzled to find that his carefully kept log was one day out; he was, however, delighted to discover that the cargo that he had brought back more than paid for the expenses of the voyage.

It is fitting to consider this first circumnavigation as marking the close of the Age of Discovery. Magellan and his men had demonstrated that Columbus had discovered a New World and not the route to China and that Columbus's "Indies"—the West Indies—were separated from the East Indies by a vast ocean.

Not all the major problems of world geography were, however, now solved. Two great questions still remained unanswered. Were there “northern passages” between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans more easily navigable than the dangerous Strait of Magellan to the south? Was there a great landmass somewhere in the vastness of the southern oceans—a Terra Australis (“southern land”) that would balance the northern continents?

4.5 THE NORTHERN PASSAGES

Roger Barlow, in his *Briefve Summe of Geographie*, written in 1540–41, asserted that “the shortest route, the northern, has been reserved by Divine Providence for England.”

The concept of a Northeast Passage was at first favoured by the English: it was thought that, although its entry was in high latitudes, it “turning itself, trendeth towards the southeast...and stretcheth directly to Cathay.” It was also argued that the cold lands bordering this route would provide a much needed market for English cloth. In 1553 a trading company, later known as the Muscovy Company, was formed with Sebastian Cabot as its governor. Under its auspices numerous expeditions were sent out. In 1553 an expedition set sail under the command of Sir Hugh Willoughby; Willoughby’s ship was lost, but the exploration continued under the leadership of its pilot general, Richard Chancellor. Chancellor and his men wintered in the White Sea, and next spring “after much adoe at last came to Mosco.” Between 1557 and 1560, another English voyager, Anthony Jenkinson, following up this opening, traveled from the White Sea to Moscow, then to the Caspian, and so on to Bukhara, thus reaching the old east–west trade routes by a new way. Soon, attempts to find a passage to Cathay were replaced by efforts to divert the trade of the ancient silk routes from their traditional outlets on the Black Sea to new northern outlets on the White Sea.

The Dutch next took up the search for the passage. The Dutch navigator William Barents made three expeditions between 1594 and 1597 (when he died in Novaya Zemlya, modern Soviet Union). The English navigator Henry Hudson, in the employ of the Dutch, discovered between 1605 and 1607 that ice blocked the way both east and west of Svalbard (Spitsbergen). Between 1725 and 1729 and from 1734 to 1743, a series of expeditions inspired by the Danish-Russian explorer Vitus Bering attempted the passage from the eastern end, but it was not until 1878–79 that Baron Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, the Finnish-Swedish scientist and explorer, sailed through it.

The Northwest Passage, on the other hand, also had its strong supporters. In 1576 Humphrey Gilbert, the English soldier and navigator, argued that “Mangia [South China], Quinzay [Hangzhou] and the Moluccas are nearer to us by the North West than by the North East,” while John Dee in 1577 set out the view that the Strait of Anian, separating America from Asia, led southwest “along the backside of

Newfoundland.” In 1534 Jacques Cartier, the French navigator, explored the St. Lawrence estuary. In 1576 the English explorer Sir Martin Frobisher found the bay named after him. Between 1585 and 1587, the English navigator John Davis explored Cumberland Sound and the western shore of Greenland to 73° N; although he met “a mighty block of ice,” he reported that “the passage is most probable and the execution easy.” In 1610 Henry Hudson sailed through Hudson Strait to Hudson Bay, confident, before he was set adrift by a mutinous crew, that success was at hand. Between 1612 and 1615, three English voyagers—Robert Bylot, Sir Thomas Button, and William Baffin—thoroughly explored the bay, returning convinced that there was no strait out of it leading westward. As in the quest for a Northeast Passage, interest turned from the search for a route leading to the riches of the East to the exploitation of local resources. Englishmen of the Hudson’s Bay Company, founded in 1670 to trade in furs, explored the wide hinterlands of the St. Lawrence estuary and Hudson Bay. Further search for the passage itself did not take place until the 19th century: expeditions led by Sir William Parry (1819–25) and Sir John Franklin (1819–45), as well as more than 40 expeditions sent out to search for Franklin and his party, failed to find the passage. It was left to the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen to be the first to sail through the passage, which he did in 1903–05.

4.6 EASTWARD VOYAGES TO THE PACIFIC

By the end of the 16th century, Portugal in the East held only the ports of Goa and Diu, in India, and Macau, in China. The English dominated the trade of India, and the Dutch that of the East Indies. It was the Dutch, trading on the fringes of the known world, who were the explorers. Victualing their ships at the Cape, they soon learned that, by sailing east for some 3,000 miles (5,000 km) before turning north, they would encounter favourable winds in setting a course toward the Spice Islands (now the Moluccas). Before long, reports were received of landfalls made on an unknown coast; as early as 1618, a Dutch skipper suggested that “this land is a fit point to be made by ships...in order to get a fixed course for Java.” Thereafter, the west coast of Australia was gradually charted: it was identified by some as the coast of the great southern continent shown on Mercator’s map and, by others, as the continent of Loach or Beach mentioned by Marco Polo, interpreted as lying to the south of Malacca (Melaka); Polo, however, was probably describing the Malay Peninsula.

In 1642 a farsighted governor general of the Dutch East India Company, Anthony van Diemen, sent out the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman for the immediate purpose of making an exploratory voyage, but with the ultimate aim of developing trade. Sailing first south then east from Mauritius, Tasman landed on the coast of Tasmania, after which he coasted round the island to the south and, sailing east, discovered the South Island of New Zealand; “We trust that this is the mainland coast of the unknown South land,” he wrote. He sailed north without finding Cook Strait, and, making a

sweeping arc on his voyage back to the Dutch port of Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia), he discovered the Tonga and the Fiji Islands. In 1644, on a second voyage, he traced the north coast of Australia from Cape York (which he thought to be a part of New Guinea) to the North West Cape.

4.7 WESTWARD VOYAGES TO THE PACIFIC

The earlier European explorers in the Pacific were primarily in search of trade or booty; the later ones were primarily in search of information. The traders, for the most part Spaniards, established land portages from harbours on the Caribbean to harbours on the west coast of Central and South America; from the Pacific coast ports of the Americas, they then set a course westward to the Philippines. Many of their ships crossed and recrossed the Pacific without making a landfall; many islands were found, named, and lost, only to be found again without recognition, renamed, and perhaps lost yet again. In the days before longitude could be accurately fixed, such uncertainty was not surprising.

Some voyages—for example, those of Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira, the Spanish explorer, in 1567 and 1568; Mendaña and the Portuguese navigator Pedro Fernández de Quirós in 1595; Quirós and another Portuguese explorer, Luis de Torres, in 1606—had, among other motives, the purpose of finding the great southern continent. Quirós was sure that in Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides he had found his goal; he “took possession of the site on which is to be founded the New Jerusalem.” Torres sailed from there to New Guinea and thence to Manila, in the Philippines. In doing so, he coasted the south shore of New Guinea, sailing through Torres Strait, unaware that another continent lay on his left hand.

The English were rivals of the Spaniards in the search for wealth in unknown lands in the Pacific. Two English seamen, Sir Francis Drake and Thomas Cavendish, circumnavigated the world from west to east in 1577 to 1580 and 1586 to 1588, respectively. One of Drake’s avowed objects was the search for Terra Australis. Once he was through Magellan’s straits, however, strong winds made him turn north—perhaps not reluctantly. He then sailed along the coast of Peru, surprising and plundering Spanish ships laden with gold, silver, precious stones, and pearls. His fortune made, Drake continued northward perhaps in search of the Northwest Passage. He explored the west coast of North America to 48° N. He returned south to winter in New Albion (California); the next summer he sailed on the Spanish route to Manila, then returned home by the Cape.

Check Your Progress

1) Explain the causes for the European explorations.

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2) Write a note on new routes discovered during the European explorations.

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3) Discuss in brief effects of European explorations.

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4.8 LET US SUM UP

The age of European exploration and discovery represented a new period of global interaction and interconnectivity. As a result of technological advancements, Europeans were able to forge into new and previously undiscovered territories. They understood this to be a “New World.”

European exploration was driven by multiple factors, including economic, political, and religious incentives. The growing desire to fulfill European demand for luxury goods, and the desire to unearth precious materials such as gold and silver, acted as a particularly crucial motivation.

The period of European global exploration sparked the beginning phases of European empire and colonialism, which would continue to develop and intensify over the course of the next several centuries.

As European exploration evolved and flourished, it saw the increasing oppression of native populations and the enslavement of Africans. During this period, Europeans increasingly dealt in African slaves and started the transatlantic slave trade.

4.9 KEY WORDS

Black Death	: A rat-borne and highly contagious disease known as the bubonic plague that swept through Europe in the 1340s, killing about one-third of the population.
Columbian Exchange	: The widespread trade of animals, plants, diseases, culture, people (including slaves), and ideas between the Western and Eastern Hemispheres that followed Spain's 1492 voyage to the Americas.
Age of Discovery	: The period starting in the early 15th century and continuing into the early 17th century during which Europeans engaged in intensive exploration of the world.

4.10 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress

- 1) See Section 4.2
- 2) See Sections 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7
- 3) See Section 4.2

UNIT 5 : THE CONQUESTS OF AMERICA

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Early Conquests, Claims and Colonies
- 5.3 Early State-Sponsored Colonists
- 5.4 The Search for Riches
- 5.5 Religious Immigration
- 5.6 Forced Immigration and Enslavement
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Key Words
- 5.9 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to know

- reasons for the European conquest of the America, and
- how Europeans moved beyond exploration and into colonization of the America.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The European colonization of the Americas describes the history of the settlement and establishment of control of the continents of the Americas by most of the naval powers of Western Europe. Systematic European colonization began in 1492, when a Spanish expedition headed by the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus sailed west to find a new trade route to the Far East but inadvertently landed in what came to be known to Europeans as the "New World". He ran aground on 5 December 1492 on Cat Island (then called Guanahani) in The Bahamas, which the Lucayan people had inhabited since the 9th century. Western European conquest, large-scale exploration and colonization soon followed. Columbus's first two voyages (1492–93) reached Hispaniola and various other Caribbean islands, including Puerto Rico and Cuba. In 1497, Italian explorer John Cabot, on behalf of the Kingdom of England, landed on the North American coast, and a year later, Columbus's third voyage reached the South American coast. As the sponsor of Christopher Columbus's voyages, Spain was the first European power to settle and colonize the largest areas, from North America and the Caribbean to the southern tip of South America.

The Spaniards began building their empire of the Americas in the Caribbean, using islands such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola as bases. The North and South American mainland fell to the conquistadors, precipitating an estimated 8,000,000 deaths of indigenous people, primarily through the spread of Afro-Eurasian diseases. Some authors have argued this demographic collapse to be the first large-scale act of genocide in the modern era. Florida fell to Juan Ponce de León after 1513. From 1519 to 1521, Hernán Cortés waged a campaign against the Aztec Empire, ruled by Moctezuma II. The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, became Mexico City, the chief city of what the Spanish were now calling "New Spain". More than 240,000 Aztecs died during the siege of Tenochtitlan, 100,000 in combat. Between 500 and 1,000 of the Spaniards engaged in the conquest died. Other conquistadors, such as Hernando de Soto, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, and Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, pushed farther north. To the south, Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca Empire during the 1530s. The centuries of continuous conflicts between the North American Indians and the Anglo-Americans were less severe than the devastation wrought on the densely populated Meso-American, Andean, and Caribbean heartlands.

The British colonization of the Americas started with the unsuccessful settlement attempts in Roanoke and Newfoundland. The English eventually went on to control much of Eastern North America, the Caribbean, and parts of South America. The British also gained Florida and Quebec in the French and Indian War.

Other powers such as France also founded colonies in the Americas: in eastern North America, a number of Caribbean islands and small coastal parts of South America. Portugal colonized Brazil, tried colonizing the eastern coasts of present-day Canada and settled for extended periods northwest (on the east bank) of the River Plate. The Age of Exploration was the beginning of territorial expansion for several European countries. Europe had been preoccupied with internal wars and was slowly recovering from the loss of population caused by the Black Death; thus the rapid rate at which it grew in wealth and power was unforeseeable in the early 15th century.

Eventually, most of the Western Hemisphere came under the control of Western European governments, leading to changes to its landscape, population, and plant and animal life. In the 19th century over 50 million people left Western Europe for the Americas. The post-1492 era is known as the period of the Columbian Exchange, a dramatically widespread exchange of animals, plants, culture, human populations (including slaves), ideas, and communicable disease between the American and Afro-Eurasian hemispheres following Columbus's voyages to the Americas.

Henry F. Dobyns estimates that immediately before European colonization of the Americas there were between 90 and 112 million people in the Americas; a larger population than Europe at the same time.

5.2 EARLY CONQUESTS, CLAIMS AND COLONIES

Early explorations and conquests were made by the Spanish and the Portuguese immediately following their own final re-conquest of Iberia in 1492. In the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, ratified by the Pope, these two kingdoms divided the entire non-European world into two areas of exploration and colonization, with a north to south boundary that cut through the Atlantic Ocean and the eastern part of present-day Brazil. Based on this treaty and on early claims by Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa, discoverer of the Pacific Ocean in 1513, the Spanish conquered large territories in North, Central and South America.

Around the late 1490s, cartographer Amerigo Vespuscio explored the American east coast, on behalf of both the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, and published in 1502–1503, his new book *Mundus Novus* (*New World*), which disproved the belief that the Americas were the easternmost part of Asia and, in actuality, an entire new world.

Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés took over the Aztec Kingdom and Francisco Pizarro conquered the Inca Empire. As a result, by the mid-16th century, the Spanish Crown had gained control of much of western South America, and southern North America, in addition to its earlier Caribbean territories. Over this same timeframe, Portugal claimed lands in North America (Canada) and colonized much of eastern South America, naming it Santa Cruz and Brazil.

Other European nations soon disputed the terms of the Treaty of Tordesillas. England and France attempted to plant colonies in the Americas in the 16th century, but these failed. England and France succeeded in establishing permanent colonies in the following century, along with the Dutch Republic. Some of these were on Caribbean islands, which had often already been conquered by the Spanish or depopulated by disease, while others were in eastern North America, which had not been colonized by Spain north of Florida.

Early European possessions in North America included Spanish Florida, Spanish New Mexico, the English colonies of Virginia (with its North Atlantic offshoot, Bermuda) and New England, the French colonies of Acadia and Canada, the Swedish colony of New Sweden, and the Dutch New Netherland. In the 18th century, Denmark–Norway revived its former colonies in Greenland, while the Russian Empire gained a foothold in Alaska. Denmark–Norway would later make several claims in the Caribbean, starting in the 1600s.

As more nations gained an interest in the colonization of the Americas, competition for territory became increasingly fierce. Colonists often faced the threat of attacks from neighbouring colonies, as well as from indigenous tribes and pirates.

5.3 EARLY STATE-SPONSORED COLONISTS

The first phase of well-financed European activity in the Americas began with the Atlantic Ocean crossings of Christopher Columbus (1492–1504), sponsored by Spain, whose original attempt was to find a new route to India and China, known as "the Indies". He was followed by other explorers such as John Cabot, who was sponsored by England and reached Newfoundland. Pedro Álvares Cabral reached Brazil and claimed it for Portugal.

Amerigo Vespucci, working for Portugal in voyages from 1497 to 1513, established that Columbus had reached a new set of continents. Cartographers still use a Latinized version of his first name, *America*, for the two continents. Other explorers included Giovanni da Verrazzano, sponsored by France in 1524; the Portuguese João Vaz Corte-Real in Newfoundland; João Fernandes Lavrador, Gaspar and Miguel Corte-Real and João Álvares Fagundes, in Newfoundland, Greenland, Labrador, and Nova Scotia (from 1498 to 1502, and in 1520); Jacques Cartier (1491–1557), Henry Hudson (1560s–1611), and Samuel de Champlain (1567–1635), who explored the region of Canada he reestablished as New France.

In 1513, Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and led the first European expedition to see the Pacific Ocean from the west coast of the New World. In an action with enduring historical import, Balboa claimed the Pacific Ocean and all the lands adjoining it for the Spanish Crown. It was 1517 before another expedition, from Cuba, visited Central America, landing on the coast of Yucatán in search of slaves. These explorations were followed, notably in the case of Spain, by a phase of conquest: The Spaniards, having just finished the *Reconquista* of Spain from Muslim rule, were the first to colonize the Americas, applying the same model of governing their European holdings to their territories of the New World.

Ten years after Columbus's discovery, the administration of Hispaniola was given to Nicolás de Ovando of the Order of Alcántara, founded during the *Reconquista*. As in the Iberian Peninsula, the inhabitants of Hispaniola were given new landmasters, while religious orders handled the local administration. Progressively the *encomienda* system, which granted tribute (access to indigenous labour and taxation) to European settlers, was set in place. A relatively common misconception is that a small number of *conquistadores* conquered vast territories, aided only by disease epidemics and their powerful caballeros. In fact, recent archaeological excavations have suggested a vast Spanish-Indian alliance numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Hernán Cortés eventually conquered Mexico with the help of Tlaxcala in 1519–1521, while the conquest of Peru was supported by some 40,000 Incan renegades led by Francisco Pizarro in between 1532 and 1535.

Over the first century and a half after Columbus's voyages, the native population of the Americas plummeted by an estimated 80% (from around 50 million in 1492 to eight million in 1650), mostly by outbreaks of Old World diseases.

In 1532, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor sent a vice-king to Mexico, Antonio de Mendoza, in order to prevent Cortes' independentist drives, who definitively returned to Spain in 1540. Two years later, Charles V signed the New Laws (which replaced the Laws of Burgos of 1512) prohibiting slavery and the *repartimientos*, but also claiming as his own all the lands of the Americas and all of the indigenous people as his own subjects.

When Pope Alexander VI issued the *Inter caetera* bull in May 1493 granting the new lands to the Kingdom of Spain, he requested in exchange an evangelization of the people. Thus, during Columbus's second voyage, Benedictine monks accompanied him, along with twelve other priests. As slavery was prohibited between Christians, and could only be imposed in non-Christian prisoners of war or on men already sold as slaves, the debate on Christianization was particularly acute during the 16th century. In 1537, the papal bull *Sublimis Deus* definitively recognized that Native Americans possessed souls, thus prohibiting their enslavement, without putting an end to the debate. Some claimed that a native who had rebelled and then been captured could be enslaved nonetheless.

Later, two Dominican priests, Bartolomé de Las Casas and the philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, held the Valladolid debate, with the former arguing that Native Americans were endowed with souls like all other human beings, while the latter argued to the contrary to justify their enslavement.

The process of Christianization was at first violent: when the first Franciscans arrived in Mexico in 1524, they burned the places dedicated to pagan cult, alienating much of the local population. In the 1530s, they began to adapt Christian practices to local customs, including the building of new churches on the sites of ancient places of worship, leading to a mix of Old World Christianity with local religions. The Spanish Roman Catholic Church, needing the natives' labour and cooperation, evangelized in Quechua, Nahuatl, Guaraní and other Native American languages, contributing to the expansion of these indigenous languages and equipping some of them with writing systems. One of the first primitive schools for Native Americans was founded by Fray Pedro de Gante in 1523.

To reward their troops, the *Conquistadores* often allotted Indian towns to their troops and officers. Black African slaves were introduced to substitute for Native American labour in some locations—including the West Indies, where the indigenous population was nearing extinction on many islands.

During this time, the Portuguese gradually switched from an initial plan of establishing trading posts to extensive colonization of what is now Brazil. They imported millions of slaves to run their plantations. The Portuguese and Spanish

royal governments expected to rule these settlements and collect at least 20% of all treasure found (the *quinto real* collected by the *Casa de Contratación*), in addition to collecting all the taxes they could. By the late 16th century silver from the Americas accounted for one-fifth of Spain's total budget. In the 16th century perhaps 240,000 Europeans entered ports in the Americas.

5.4 THE SEARCH FOR RICHES

Inspired by the Spanish riches from colonies founded upon the conquest of the Aztecs, Incas, and other large Native American populations in the 16th century, the first Englishmen to settle permanently in America hoped for some of the same rich discoveries when they established their first permanent settlement in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. They were sponsored by common stock companies such as the chartered Virginia Company financed by wealthy Englishmen who exaggerated the economic potential of this new land. The main purpose of this colony was the hope of finding gold. It took John Smith, to convince the colonists of Jamestown that searching for gold was not taking care of their immediate needs for food and shelter. The lack of food security leading to extremely high mortality rate was quite distressing and cause for despair among the colonists. To support the Colony, numerous supply missions were organized. Tobacco later became a cash crop, with the work of John Rolfe and others, for export and the sustaining economic driver of Virginia and the neighbouring colony of Maryland.

From the beginning of Virginia's settlements in 1587 until the 1680s, the main source of labour and a large portion of the immigrants were indentured servants looking for new life in the overseas colonies. During the 17th century, indentured servants constituted three-quarters of all European immigrants to the Chesapeake region. Most of the indentured servants were teenagers from England with poor economic prospects at home. Their fathers signed the papers that gave them free passage to America and an unpaid job until they became of age. They were given food, clothing, housing and taught farming or household skills. American landowners were in need of labourers and were willing to pay for a labourer's passage to America if they served them for several years. By selling passage for five to seven years worth of work, they could then start on their own in America. Many of the migrants from England died in the first few years.

Economic advantage also prompted the Darien Scheme, an ill-fated venture by the Kingdom of Scotland to settle the Isthmus of Panama in the late 1690s. The Darien Scheme aimed to control trade through that part of the world and thereby promote Scotland into a world trading power. However, it was doomed by poor planning, short provisions, weak leadership, lack of demand for trade goods, and devastating disease. The failure of the Darien Scheme was one of the factors that led the Kingdom of Scotland into the Act of Union 1707 with the Kingdom of England creating the united Kingdom of Great Britain and giving Scotland commercial access to English, now British, colonies.

In the French colonial regions, the focus of economy was on sugar plantations in Caribbean. In Canada the fur trade with the natives was important. About 16,000 French men and women became colonizers. The great majority became subsistence farmers along the St. Lawrence River. With a favourable disease environment and plenty of land and food, their numbers grew exponentially to 65,000 by 1760. Their colony was taken over by Britain in 1760, but social, religious, legal, cultural and economic changes were few in a society that clung tightly to its recently formed traditions.

5.5 RELIGIOUS IMMIGRATION

Roman Catholics were the first major religious group to immigrate to the New World, as settlers in the colonies of Portugal and Spain, and later, France, belonged to that faith. English and Dutch colonies, on the other hand, tended to be more religiously diverse. Settlers to these colonies included Anglicans, Dutch Calvinists, English Puritans and other nonconformists, English Catholics, Scottish Presbyterians, French Huguenots, German and Swedish Lutherans, as well as Jews, Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, and Moravians. Many groups of colonists went to the Americas searching for the right to practice their religion without persecution. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century broke the unity of Western Christendom and led to the formation of numerous new religious sects, which often faced persecution by governmental authorities. In England, many people came to question the organization of the Church of England by the end of the 16th century. One of the primary manifestations of this was the Puritan movement, which sought to "purify" the existing Church of England of its residual Catholic rites.

Waves of repression led to the migration of about 20,000 Puritans to New England between 1629 and 1642, where they founded multiple colonies. Later in the century, the new Pennsylvania colony was given to William Penn in settlement of a debt the king owed his father. Its government was established by William Penn in about 1682 to become primarily a refuge for persecuted English Quakers; but others were welcomed. Baptists, German and Swiss Protestants and Anabaptists also flocked to Pennsylvania. The lure of cheap land, religious freedom and the right to improve themselves with their own hand was very attractive.

5.6 FORCED IMMIGRATION AND ENSLAVEMENT

Slavery was a common practice in the Americas prior to the arrival of Europeans, as different American Indian groups captured and held other tribes' members as slaves. Many of these captives were forced to undergo human sacrifice in Amerindian civilizations such as the Aztecs. In response to some enslavement of natives in the Caribbean during the early years, the Spanish Crown passed a series of laws prohibiting slavery as early as 1512. A new stricter set of laws was passed in 1542, called the *New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of*

Indians, or simply New Laws. These were created to prevent the exploitation of the indigenous peoples by the *encomenderos* or landowners, by strictly limiting their power and dominion. This helped curb Indian slavery considerably, though not completely. Later, with the arrival of other European colonial powers in the New World, the enslavement of native populations increased, as these empires lacked legislation against slavery until decades later. The population of indigenous peoples declined (mostly from European diseases, but also from forced exploitation and atrocities). Later, native workers were replaced by Africans imported through a large commercial slave trade.

By the 18th century, the overwhelming number of black slaves was such that Amerindian slavery was less commonly used. Africans, who were taken aboard slave ships to the Americas, were primarily obtained from their African homelands by coastal tribes who captured and sold them. Europeans traded for slaves with the slave capturers of the local native African tribes in exchange for rum, guns, gunpowder, and other manufactures.

The total slave trade to islands in the Caribbean, Brazil, Mexico and to the United States is estimated to have involved 12 million Africans. The vast majority of these slaves went to sugar colonies in the Caribbean and to Brazil, where life expectancy was short and the numbers had to be continually replenished. At most about 600,000 African slaves were imported into the United States, or 5% of the 12 million slaves brought across from Africa. Life expectancy was much higher in the United States (because of better food, less disease, lighter workloads, and better medical care) so the numbers grew rapidly by excesses of births over deaths, reaching 4 million by the 1860 Census. Slaves were a valuable commodity both for work and for sale in slave markets and so the policy of actively encouraging or forcing slaves to breed developed, especially after the ending of the Atlantic slave trade. From 1770 until 1860, the rate of growth of North American slaves was much greater than for the population of any nation in Europe, and was nearly twice as rapid as that of England.

Check Your Progress

1) Discuss the main reasons for the European conquest of the America.

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2) Write a note on impact of religious immigration to the New World

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

Geographic differences between the colonies played a large determinant in the types of political and economic systems that later developed. In their paper on institutions and long-run growth, economists Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson argue that certain natural endowments gave rise to distinct colonial policies promoting either smallholder or coerced labour production. Densely settled populations, for example, were more easily exploitable and profitable as slave labour. In these regions, landowning elites were economically incentivized to develop forced labour arrangements such as the Peru mit'a system or Argentinian latifundias without regard for democratic norms. French and British colonial leaders, conversely, were incentivized to develop capitalist markets, property rights, and democratic institutions in response to natural environments that supported smallholder production over forced labour. James Mahoney, a professor at Northwestern University, proposes that colonial policy choices made at critical junctures regarding land ownership in coffee-rich Central America fostered enduring path dependent institutions. Coffee economies in Guatemala and El Salvador, for example, were centralized around large plantations that operated under coercive labour systems. By the 19th century, their political structures were largely authoritarian and militarized. In Colombia and Costa Rica, conversely, liberal reforms were enacted at critical junctures to expand commercial agriculture, and they ultimately raised the bargaining power of the middle class. Both nations eventually developed more democratic and egalitarian institutions than their highly concentrated landowning counterparts.

5.8 KEY WORDS

Conquistadores	: a conqueror, especially one of the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru in the 16 th century.
Inter Caetera	: Pope Alexander VI issues a papal bull or decree Spain and Portugal to colonize, convert, and enslave.
Reconquista	: in medieval Spain and Portugal, a series of campaigns by Christian states to recapture territory from the Muslims (Moors), who had occupied most of the Iberian Peninsula in the early 8th century.

5.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress

- 1) See Section 5.2
- 2) See Section 5.5

UNIT 6 : MINING AND PLANTATION, THE AFRICAN SLAVES.

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 From Gold and Spices to Slaves
- 6.3 The African Coast
- 6.4 The Scramble to join the Trade
- 6.5 Goods to Africa
- 6.6 A Regulated Business
- 6.7 Britain's Gains from the Slave Trade
- 6.8 Trade Goods
- 6.9 European Rivalry
- 6.10 The 'Illicit' Slave Trade
- 6.11 The Consequences of Slavery and the Slave Trade
- 6.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.13 Key Words
- 6.14 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to know about;

- development of trade between Africa and Europe,
- transatlantic slave trade that began from the 15th century and until the end of the 19th century, and
- economic and social consequences generated by slavery and slave trade.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The transatlantic slave trade lay at the centre of a complex global commercial system. It was also the cause of an occasion for international rivalries and tensions on three continents. Europeans fought each other for a share of the trade to and from Africa. They clashed over possessions in the Americas that required slave labour. And they even disputed each other's presence on the high seas. That slaves and the slave trade lay at the heart of such friction, over many centuries, is itself proof of the value Europeans attached to slavery itself.

6.2 FROM GOLD AND SPICES TO SLAVES

Europeans had initially encountered the peoples and commodities of sub-Saharan Africa via ancient overland routes across the Sahara and along the Nile. Direct contact took place when, in the 15th and 16th centuries, traders and adventurers cautiously sailed along the African coast, which gave them access to West Africa and thence to trading routes deep into the African interior.

Portuguese and Spanish seafarers shipped enslaved African people to Spain and Portugal and to their islands in the Atlantic, but slaves were only a small part of what interested these adventurous traders: gold, spices, dyes, and timbers, ivory – a host of African commodities – were far more attractive.

But all those were pushed aside, after 1600, by the lucrative development of plantations in the America. Henceforth, humans, not inanimate commodities, were the greatest commercial attraction for European traders along a vast stretch of African coastline, from Senegambia to Angola.

6.3 THE AFRICAN COAST

The Spaniards and Portuguese pioneered the slave trade. Like those who followed, they depended for supplies of enslaved people (along with other items) on trading contacts along the African coast. Sometimes they traded with powerful African kingdoms – for instance, Kongo – and sometimes with African middlemen who dominated trade routes into the interior. Although Europeans began to build 'slave dungeons' and forts along the slave coast – notably along the 'Gold Coast', modern-day Ghana – they rarely had more than a tentative toe-hold on the African shore.

Slave trading varied greatly from place to place, much depending on local geography. Sometimes it was carried out from settled communities, sometimes from forts and established bases. Often Europeans traded from their ships riding offshore.

In 1493, the initial division of slave trading regions between Spain and Portugal had been made by Pope Alexander VI. In the Treaty of Tordesillas,

Spain was given all of the Americas, while Portugal had Africa and India. Then, in a further treaty a year later, Portugal was given Brazil. However, the arrangements in Africa were eventually contested by the newly emergent European maritime powers – by, in turn, the Dutch, the English and the French.

6.4 THE SCRAMBLE TO JOIN THE TRADE

Spain didn't engage in the slave trade directly but was supplied with Africans by various countries via a series of *asientos* (contracts). However, other maritime nations wanted their own slave trade. The English, for example, established a joint-stock enterprise, the Royal African Company, but this monopoly failed to provide

planters with what they wanted and simply gave way under the growing colonial demand for more forced African labour. When a freer British slave trade was finally established – after protracted political and commercial argument – it ushered in an era of massive expansion. Enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic in huge and increasing numbers. By the peak years of the 18th century, the British were shipping 40,000 people a year.

European traders scrambled to join in the slave trading business. Monarchs and princes, powerful merchants and landowners, even small craftsmen and modest property owners invested in slave ships. They all hoped it would yield the fabled wealth that quickly came to be attached to transatlantic slavery. In fact, the profits derived from slave voyages were often more modest than we imagine, but the prospects of great profit lured people of all sorts and conditions to invest in the trade in African humanity.

6.5 GOODS TO AFRICA

Europeans soon came to view slavery as simply another form of oceanic trade. In return for the growing numbers of African captives loaded on to their slave ships, they had to offer tangible items to the African merchants. Each side – usually European and African, and traders gradually learned what they needed to supply to buy slaves or were given specific instructions.

Arms and metal goods, textiles and luxuries, metal bars – all were carefully placed in the holds of outbound ships in the hope of exchanging them for enslaved Africans. Of course, in the process, Europeans acquired more than the slaves, purchasing other African commodities, notably precious items – gold, ivory – and the exotic spices of the region.

Trading was often accompanied by violence, but the initial European snatching and grabbing of Africans – a form of piracy against them – quickly gave way to conventional barter and trade. Both sides knew what the other wanted, and both tried to trade to their own advantage.

6.6 A REGULATED BUSINESS

The slave trade became a highly regulated business, as each slaving nation sought to license and control its own part of it. The trade received formal state backing from monarchs and from legislatures, while attracting little criticism from religious bodies. And those states sought to enhance their own slaving strength not merely by force of arms, but by diplomacy and treaties. Like the Spanish and Portuguese, they agreed to trade in specific regions and signed treaties to provide Africans to other colonies, allowing their opponents to trade elsewhere.

The British slave trade was carefully regulated from its early days. Even the first efforts of privateers – notably Sir John Hawkins– were subject to royal approval. In the 18th century, royal backing (it was, after all, the Royal African Company) gave way to full-blown parliamentary support. Indeed Parliament spent as much time discussing (and legislating for) the expansion and regulation of the slave trade as it was to spend on abolition a century later, passing dozens of Acts to fine-tune the trade.

Similarly, slavery in the colonies was regulated by colonial laws approved in London. What this means is that the trade in Africans and the use of colonial slavery were not merely haphazard offshoots of economic growth: they were the subject of considered political and legal attention in London, as well as in other European capitals.

In addition, the trade was made possible by the development of modern financial systems. Global trade on such a vast geographic scale involved enormous time lags. Slave ships were away from their home ports for 12–18 months at a time, and sugar and tobacco were sold in Europe many months after being harvested by slaves. As a result, ship owners and planters were always in need of credit – especially for the purchase of Africans – and so evolved a complex international system of flows of cash and commodities and bills of credit. This made possible the buying of African slaves and the produce they cultivated and harvested. Equally complex systems of insurance developed to cover the risks and dangers of oceanic trade.

6.7 BRITAIN'S GAINS FROM THE SLAVE TRADE

We know of about 40,000 slave voyages over the history of the slave trade, and the image of the slave ships remains perhaps the best-remembered feature of the trade itself. Some 12 million Africans were loaded on to those vessels, which ranged from small craft weighing only a few tons to huge ships of 500 tons. The experience of the voyages traumatised the Africans who survived them, and memories of the crossing entered the folklore of slave communities across the Americas.

The ships operated from most of Europe's major ports, though by the late 18th century, quite a few were based in the slave ports of the Americas, notably Newport, Rhode Island and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. In Britain, the trade was, by turns, dominated by London, Bristol and Liverpool.

The physical and social development of the last two cities was clearly tied up with the slave trade and with the buoyant commerce needed to build, fit out and fill slave ships. The trade gave employment not only to huge numbers of sailors, but it spawned jobs in a host of local industries – in the port itself and also far into the hinterland.

Despite the prominence of Liverpool, Bristol and London, and many other British ports profited from some involvement in the slave trade – some, like Glasgow,

through the importation of slave produce, others, like Whitehaven in Cumbria and Lancaster, from direct trafficking in human lives. Between them, these two ports accounted for more than 43,000 enslaved Africans being taken out of Africa.

6.8 TRADE GOODS

Textiles from Yorkshire and Lancashire, salt from Cheshire, pottery from Staffordshire, metal goods (chains, fetters, manacles and guns) from the Midlands – all were transported along the canals to Liverpool to be loaded on to the slave ships bound for Africa and the Americas. Ireland provided enormous amounts of food to feed crews and slaves and to be shipped to the American plantations. The slave ships were weighed down by materials and produce from all corners of the British Isles, and much of it was consumed by Africans or exchanged for Africans on the African coast.

While the slave ships provided the plantations with the African labour required for tropical toil, the colonists needed more than that and so were also dependent on the transatlantic shipping routes for their survival. They required a constant supply of imports in addition to enslaved Africans – equipment, seeds, plants, animals, metal goods, factory equipment, food and clothing for the slaves, timber for construction.

In return, extraordinary volumes of slave-grown produce were shipped eastwards: sugar and rum from the Caribbean and Brazil; tobacco from Virginia and, later, from Cuba; rice from the Carolinas; coffee from Jamaica and Brazil; and, in the 19th century, enormous quantities of cotton from the southern United States to feed the industries of Britain. After delivering their African cargoes, the slave ships transported some of this slave-grown produce back to Europe. However, many more non-slave ships were required to transport all that the plantations produced.

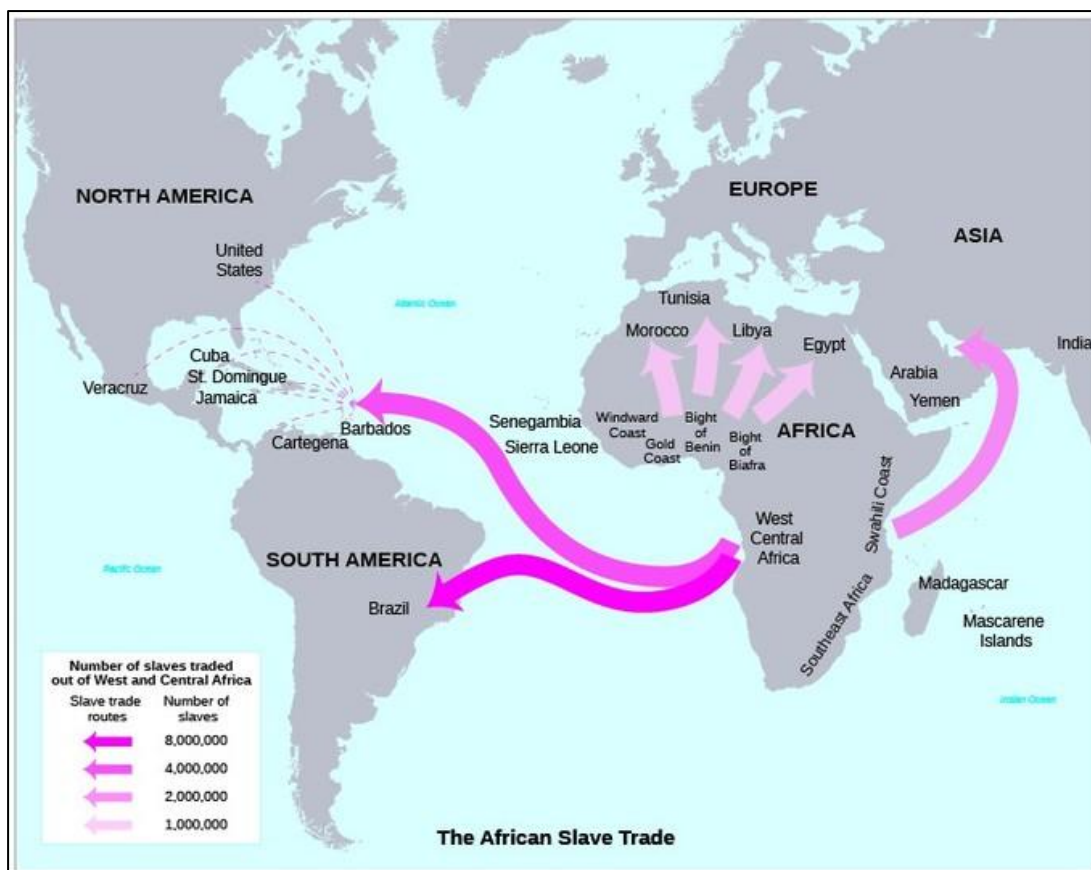
Although it is tempting to think of the slave trade as a 'triangular' system, it was much more complex than that label suggests. The term is Eurocentric in its view as it begins and ends with Europe. There were, for example, slave ships that traded exclusively between Africa and South or North America. Other ships sailed back and forth between Europe and Africa, and still others from Europe to the Americas and then back with produce. There was, in fact, a complex mesh of shipping routes in the Atlantic, ferrying people and goods back and forth between all the major points of the slaving compass.

6.9 EUROPEAN RIVALRY

Inevitably, however, the slave trade caused friction and conflict. European rivalries in the 17th and 18th centuries were played out in all the corners of globe. When at war, as they often were, slave trading nations did their best to grab their opponents' ships and fought each other for access to, or control over, the slave trading sites, the transatlantic trading routes and the much prized slave colonies. They did this not

merely because of the prevailing belief in empire and colonisation, but because slavery yielded such material bounty to the winners, as exemplified by the castles (slave dungeons) on the Gold Coast, notably St Jorge's at Elmina.

The slave trade changed markedly over time, reflecting the changes in political and military power among the nations involved in it. The initially dominant Portuguese were replaced by the Dutch in the late 16th century. They, in their turn were usurped by the British and French from the 17th century. These two struggled for supremacy in the 18th century, not merely in the Atlantic but all over the world, from India to North America and the Caribbean. Although Britain – and especially Liverpool – dominated the slave trade by mid-century, the ports of Nantes and Bordeaux and, above all, the expansive colony of St Domingue – what would become Haiti – threatened to push the British aside. That threat ended with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, the Haitian slave revolution of 1791 and the subsequent collapse of French power in the enslaved Caribbean.



Routes of the African Slave Trade

(Source: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-ushistory/chapter/the-expansion-of-europe/>)

6.10 THE 'ILLICIT' SLAVE TRADE

After the British abolished their slave trade in 1807, 'illicit' slave traders from Spain, Portugal and Brazil, working mainly in the south Atlantic, were harried and pursued

by the British naval factions on both sides of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, there was a notably British involvement in the continuing slave trade. We now know that, despite the British and American anti-slavery patrols and British diplomatic pressure to prevent slave trading in the Atlantic, another 3 million Africans were transported across to the Americas (mainly to Cuba and Brazil) between 1807 and 1860. Increasingly, it was a trade in children, drawn mainly from central Africa. Thereafter the transatlantic trade died out.

After 1800 in the United States, slave trading was internal, not oceanic, with slaves being moved westwards from the old slave states to the new cotton frontier.

6.11 THE CONSEQUENCES OF SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE TRADE

Arguments continue about the profitability of the transatlantic slave trade, but what remain indisputable are the remarkable economic and social consequences generated by it. It was responsible for the enslavement of millions of Africans: the 12 million loaded on to the ships were only a percentage of those enslaved initially in Africa. It made possible the profitable cultivation of key areas of the Americas. It spawned expansive industry in Europe and the Americas, and it generated a complex financial system – borrowing, lending and insuring – which profited the major merchants, lending houses and banks of Europe and the Americas.

It also generated a remarkable transformation in Europeans' way of life. They now consumed new crops – tobacco, sugar, rice – grown by Africans forcibly shipped across the Atlantic. They also mixed slave-grown sugar with tea imported from China or coffee from the Horn of Africa or Dutch Indonesia, drinking it from cups made in China. Here was a truly global trade made possible by the transatlantic slave trade. Yet in all discussion about profitable commerce, we need to recognise that not only did the slave trade create desperate unhappiness and despair in millions of people, it also impoverished great swathes of Africa.

We know who benefited from the slave trade, not least because they left behind ample testimony to their successes: plantation great houses, merchant's homes, major banks, rural retreats - all those and more provide testimony to the prosperity yielded by the slave trade. Less frequently noted, however, is the plight of underdeveloped African nations, and the millions of African descendants, scattered across the Americas by this slave system, who had little to show for their slave origins but their poverty.

Check Your Exercises

1) What was the purpose of the Slave Trade?

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2) How were slaves captured in Africa?

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3) What were the main British ports involved in the Slave Trade?

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4) What kind of goods did the slave ships carry on the final stage of the Triangular Trade?

6.12 LET US SUM UP

From the middle of the 15th century, Africa entered into a unique relationship with Europe that led to the devastation and depopulation of Africa, but contributed to the wealth and development of Europe. From then until the end of the 19th century, Europeans began to establish a trade for African captives. The transatlantic slave trade began during the 15th century when Portugal, and subsequently other European kingdoms, were finally able to expand overseas and reach Africa. The Portuguese first began to kidnap people from the west coast of Africa and to take those they enslaved back to Europe.

It is estimated that by the early 16th century as much as 10% of Lisbon's population was of African descent. After the European discovery of the American continent, the demand for African labour gradually grew, as other sources of labour - both European and American - were found to be insufficient. The Spanish took the first African captives to the Americas from Europe as early as 1503, and by 1518 the first captives were shipped directly from Africa to America. The majority of African captives were exported from the coast of West Africa, some 3,000 miles between what is now Senegal and Angola, and mostly from the modern Benin, Nigeria and Cameroon.

6.13 KEY WORDS

Enslavement : the action of making someone a slave; subjugation.

Slave Trading: the procuring, transporting, and selling of human beings as slaves, in particular the former trade in black Africans as slaves by European countries and North America.

6.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Exercises

- 1) See Section 6.2
- 2) See Section 6.5
- 3) See Section 6.7
- 4) See Section 6.10

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