

Exploration: Causes and Events

You can never cross the ocean unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.

—Christopher Columbus (1451-1506)

Essential Question: What were the causes and effects of the state-sponsored expansion of maritime exploration?

Thanks in part to improved navigation techniques, Italian cities with ports on the Mediterranean had a monopoly on European trade with Asia. By controlling access to the trade routes, the Italians controlled prices of Asian imports to Europe, driving Spain and Portugal, and later France, England, and the Netherlands, into the search for new routes to Asia. Explorers hoped to find riches overseas, especially gold and silver. In addition to these economic and political reasons, explorers were interested in converting others to Christianity. Also, technological breakthroughs in sailing and navigation made bold new voyages possible.

Christopher Columbus, quoted above and credited with “discovering the New World,” was fortunate in 1492 to gain the support of the Spanish monarchs, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, for his voyages across the Atlantic. His journeys helped increase the interest in discovery, and the English, French, and Dutch supported later exploration.

The Role of States in Maritime Exploration

European states were seeking ways to expand their authority and control of resources in the era of empire-building. Conquests brought new wealth to states through the collection of taxes and through new trading opportunities. In time it also brought great material wealth, especially in silver, to European states. Rivalries among European states stoked efforts to expand before another power might claim a territory. Religion was also a motivating force for exploration and expansion. Many Europeans believed that it was their Christian duty to seek out people in other lands to convert them.

For all these reasons, states were centrally involved in maritime exploration. Voyages such as those Columbus undertook were expensive, and without the financial support of a state, they would most likely have been too expensive

for explorers and even most merchants to be able to afford. Since religion was tightly woven into the government of most European states, preserving and spreading a state's religion became another reason for state involvement.

Also, in the 17th century, Europeans generally measured the wealth of a country in how much gold and silver it had accumulated. For this reason, countries set policies designed to sell as many goods as they could to other countries—in order to maximize the amount of gold and silver coming into the country—and to buy as few as possible from other countries—to minimize the flow of precious metals out of the country. This theory, known as **mercantilism**, required heavy government involvement.

Expansion of European Maritime Exploration

In no nation were the interests of the state and the interest of explorers as closely tied as they were in Portugal, which led the way in European exploration as it had in maritime innovations. (See Topic 2.3.)

Portuguese in Africa and India The small kingdom of Portugal, bounded on the east by the Spanish kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, could expand only overseas. Three people led its exploration:

- **Prince Henry the Navigator** (1394–1460) became the first European monarch to sponsor seafaring expeditions, to search for an all-water route to the east as well as for African gold. Under him, Portugal began importing enslaved Africans by sea, replacing the overland slave trade.
- **Bartholomew Diaz** sailed around the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, in 1488, into waters his crew did not know. Diaz feared a mutiny if he continued pushing eastward, so he returned home.
- **Vasco Da Gama** sailed farther east than Diaz, landing in India in 1498. There he claimed territory as part of Portugal's empire. The Portuguese ports in India were a key step in expanding Portugal's trade in the Indian Ocean and with points farther east.

Portuguese in Southeast and East Asia Early in the 16th century, the ruthless Portuguese admiral Afonso de Albuquerque won a short but bloody battle with Arab traders and set up a factory at Malacca in present-day Indonesia. He had previously served as governor of Portuguese India (1509–1515), sending strings of Indians' ears home to Portugal as evidence of his conquests.

China's exploration of the outside world came to an end after Zheng He's final voyage in the 1430s. (See Topic 2.3.) However, less than a century later, in 1514, the outside world arrived on China's doorstep in the form of Portuguese traders. At that time, Portugal's superior ships and weapons were unmatched among the Europeans. As a result of this advantage, the Portuguese had already won control of both the African and Indian coasts. They had won a decisive victory over a Turkish-Egyptian-Venetian fleet at Diu, India, in 1509.

Initial Portuguese visits had little impact on Chinese society. But the traders were followed by Roman Catholic missionaries, mainly Franciscans and Dominicans, who worked to gain converts among the Chinese people.

The Jesuits soon followed and tried to win over the Chinese court elite. Scientific and technical knowledge were the keys to success at the court. Jesuit missionaries in Macau, such as Matteo Ricci (an Italian, arrived 1582) and Adam Schall von Bell (a German, arrived 1619), impressed the Chinese with their learning. However, they failed to win many converts among the hostile scholar-gentry, who considered them barbaric.

Trading Post Empire To ensure control of trade, the Portuguese had constructed a series of forts stretching from Hormuz on the Persian Gulf (built in 1507) to Goa in western India (built in 1510) to Malacca on the Malay Peninsula (built in 1511). The aims of the fort construction were to establish a monopoly (complete control over a market) over the spice trade in the area and to license all vessels trading between Malacca and Hormuz. The forts gave Portugal a global **trading post empire**, one based on small outposts, rather than control of large territories. The Portuguese also restricted Indian Ocean trade to those who were willing to buy permits.

Portuguese Vulnerability The Portuguese succeeded in global trade for several decades, but Portugal was a small nation, lacking the workers and the ships necessary for the enforcement of a large trade empire. Many Portuguese merchants ignored their government and traded independently. Corruption among government officials also hampered the trading empire. By the 17th century, Dutch and English rivals were challenging the Portuguese in East Asia, including islands that are today part of Malaysia and Indonesia.

The Dutch captured Malacca and built a fort at Batavia in Java in 1620. From Batavia, the Dutch attempted to monopolize the spice trade. As a result, the English focused on India, pushing the Portuguese out of South Asia.

In the early 16th century, the Portuguese also travelled to Japan to trade, followed by Christian missionaries in 1549. They formed large Catholic settlements until the 1600s, when Japanese rulers outlawed Catholicism and expelled the missionaries.

Spanish in the Philippines Portuguese explorers such as Vasco da Gama were the first Western Europeans to reach the Indian Ocean by sea by going around the southern tip of Africa. Spanish ships, however, became the first to circumnavigate the globe when the government sponsored the voyage of **Ferdinand Magellan**. He died on the voyage in the Philippine Islands in 1522, but one of the ships in his fleet made it around the world, proving that the earth could be circumnavigated.

Spain annexed the Philippines in 1521 when Magellan's fleet arrived there. The Spanish returned in 1565 and started a long campaign to conquer the Filipinos, who put up fierce resistance. **Manila** became a Spanish commercial center in the area, attracting Chinese merchants and others. Because of the Portuguese and Spanish occupations, many Filipinos became Christians.



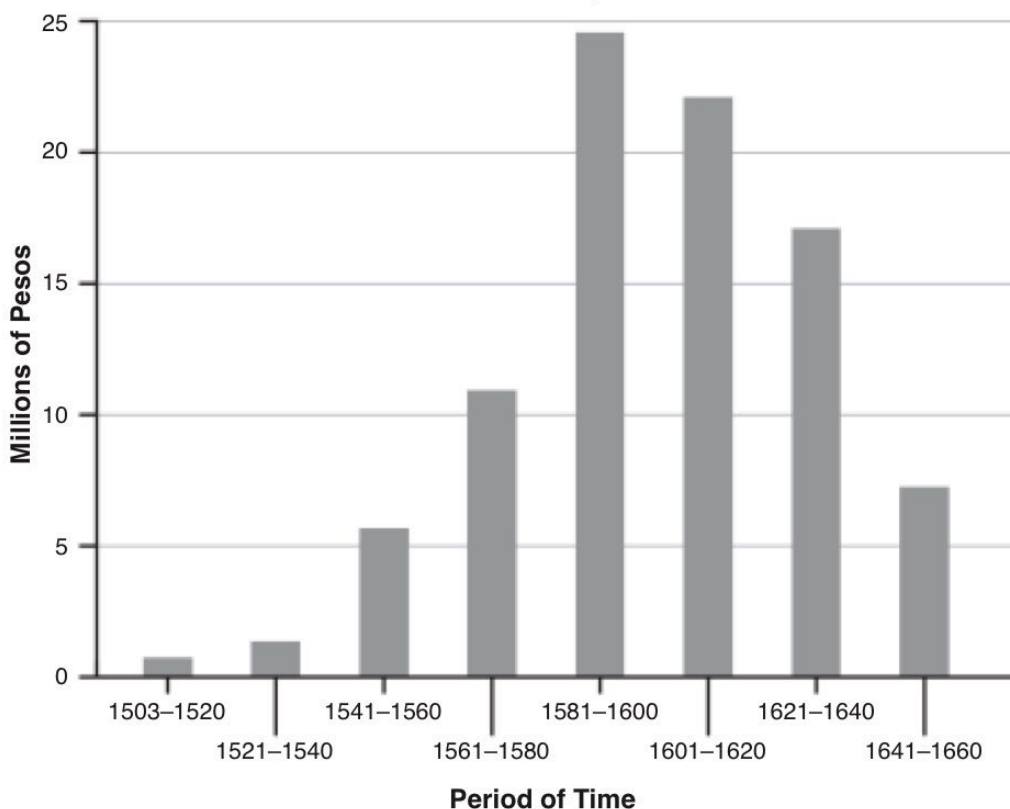
The Lure of Riches

Columbus and other European explorers sought a new route to Asia and hoped to find gold, silver, and other valuable resources. The Spanish found so little of value in their first two decades of contact that they considered stopping further exploration. The English, after sponsoring voyages in the 1490s, made little attempt to explore or settle for almost a century.

However, European interest in the Americas was rekindled when the Spanish came into contact with the two major empires in the region, the Aztecs in Mesoamerica and the Incas in South America. These empires had the gold and silver that made exploration, conquest, and settlement profitable. In addition, Europeans soon realized that, by using enslaved Native Americans and later enslaved Africans, they could grow wealthy by raising sugar, tobacco, and other valuable crops.

Trade Across the Pacific China was a particularly enthusiastic consumer of this silver from the Western Hemisphere. Silver, for example, made its way from what is now Mexico across the Pacific Ocean to East Asia in heavily armed Spanish ships known as **galleons** that made stops in the Philippines. At the trading post in Manila, Europeans exchanged silver for luxury goods such as silk and spices, and even for gold bullion. The impressive Manila galleons allowed the silver trade to flourish. Indeed, the Chinese government soon began using silver as its main form of currency. By the early 17th century, silver had become a dominant force in the global economic system.

Spain's Gold and Silver Imports
from the Americas, 1503–1660



Source: Earl J. Hamilton "Imports of American Gold and Silver into Spain, 1503–1660." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 1929.

Spain's rivals in Europe also explored and claimed regions in the Americas. French, English, and Dutch explorers all looked for a **northwest passage**—a route through or around North America that would lead to East Asia and the precious trade in spices and luxury goods.

French Exploration In the 1500s and 1600s, the French government sponsored expeditions in search of a northwest passage. In 1535, for example, French explorer **Jacques Cartier** sailed from the Atlantic Ocean into the St. Lawrence River at today's northern U.S. border. He did not find a new route to Asia, but he did claim part of what is now Canada for France. Eventually, explorers such as Cartier and **Samuel de Champlain** (explored 1609–1616) realized there were valuable goods and rich resources available in the Americas, so there was no need to go beyond to Asia.

Like the Spanish, the French hoped to find gold. Instead, they found a land rich in furs and other natural resources. In 1608, they established a town and trading post that they named **Quebec**. French traders and priests spread across the continent. The traders searched for furs; the priests wanted to convert Native Americans to Christianity. The missionaries sometimes set up schools among the indigenous peoples. In the 1680s, a French trader known as La Salle explored the Great Lakes and followed the Mississippi River south to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico. He claimed this vast region for France.

Unlike the Spanish—or the English who were colonizing the East Coast of what is now the United States—the French rarely settled permanently. Instead of demanding land, they traded for the furs trapped by Native Americans. For this reason, the French had better relations with natives than did the Spanish or English colonists and their settlements also grew more slowly. For example, by 1754, the European population of **New France**, the French colony in North America, was only 70,000. The English colonies included one million Europeans.

English Exploration In 1497, the English king sent an explorer named **John Cabot** to America to look for a northwest passage. Cabot claimed lands from Newfoundland south to the Chesapeake Bay. The English, however, did not have enough sea power to defend themselves against Spanish naval forces—although English pirates called “sea dogs” sometimes attacked Spanish ships. Then in 1588, the English surprisingly defeated and destroyed all but one third of the Spanish Armada. With that victory, England declared itself a major naval power and began competing for lands and resources in the Americas.

At about the same time the French were founding Quebec, the English were establishing a colony in a land called Virginia. In 1607, about one hundred English colonists traveled approximately 60 miles inland from the coast, where they built a settlement, **Jamestown**, on the James River. Both the settlement and the river were named for the ruling English monarch, James I. Jamestown was England's first successful colony in the Americas, and one of the earliest colonies in what would become the United States. The first colonies in the present-day United States were Spanish settlements in Florida and New Mexico.



Comparing Transoceanic Voyages, c. 1300–c. 1800				
Sponsoring Empire	Explorer	Key Voyages	Purpose	Impact
China	Zheng He	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India • Middle East • Africa 	To open up trade networks with India, Arabia, and Africa and to spread Chinese culture	China decided not to continue exploring
England	John Cabot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North America 	To find a sea route to the East going west from Europe	Claimed land in Canada for Britain and established a shorter, more northerly route across the Atlantic than Columbus's route.
Portugal	Vasco da Gama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West coast of Africa • India 	To open a sea route from Europe to India and China	Portugal expanded trade and cultural exchange between India and Europe
Spain	Christopher Columbus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caribbean islands • Central America 	To find a sea route to India and China going west from Europe	Spain led the European exploration and colonization of the Americas
Spain	Ferdinand Magellan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South America • Philippines 	To demonstrate that Europeans could reach Asia by sailing west	Spain established links between the Americas and Asia across the Pacific Ocean

Dutch Exploration In 1609, the Dutch sent **Henry Hudson** to explore the East Coast of North America. Among other feats, he sailed up what became known as the Hudson River to see if it led to Asia. He was disappointed in finding no northwest passage. He and other explorers would continue to search for such a route. Though it would travel through a chilly region, it offered the possibility of being only half the distance of a route that went around South America.

Though Hudson did not find a northwest passage, his explorations proved valuable to the Dutch. Based on his voyage, the Dutch claimed the Hudson River Valley and the island of Manhattan. On the tip of this island, they settled a community called **New Amsterdam**, which today is known as New York City. Like many port towns, New Amsterdam prospered because it was located where a major river flowed into the ocean.



New Amsterdam became an important node in the Dutch transatlantic trade network. Dutch merchants bought furs from trappers who lived and worked in the forest lands as far north as Canada. They purchased crops from lands to the south, particularly tobacco from Virginia planters. They sent these goods and others to the Netherlands in exchange for manufactured goods that they could sell throughout colonial North America (Connect: Explain how one of the European explorers in 4.2 compares to Marco Polo. See Topic 2.5.)

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
ECONOMICS: Europe mercantilism trading post empire Manila GOVERNMENT: Portugal Prince Henry the Navigator TECHNOLOGY: Maritime galleons	GOVERNMENT: Exploration Christopher Columbus Bartholomew Diaz Vasco Da Gama Ferdinand Magellan northwest passage Jacques Cartier Samuel de Champlain John Cabot Henry Hudson	GOVERNMENT: Colonies Quebec New France Jamestown New Amsterdam