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ECO 301Y1

The Economic History of Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe, 1250 - 1750

Topic no. 11: European Overseas Explorations and Colonizations: the Portuguese and Spanish Empires, c. 1420 - 1600

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Note: For this topic, you need to consult maps and historical atlases. I can recommend:

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 - b) John H. Munro, 'Patterns of Trade, Money, and Credit', pp. 147-96.
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 - d) Henry Kamen, 'The Habsburg Lands: Iberia', pp. 467-98.
 - e) Hugo de Schepper, 'The Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands', pp. 499-534.
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QUESTIONS:

1. What particular factors -- economic, social, cultural, political/military -- led or inspired Western Europeans, and especially Iberians, to engage in overseas explorations, discoveries, and then colonizations from the early fifteenth century?
2. How important were relations and conflicts with the Islamic (Muslim) world in Iberia and North Africa in the processes of overseas Iberian expansion? What role did the Iberian Reconquista play in these processes in particular?
3. Discuss the economic importance of Catalonia (Barcelona especially) in Mediterranean commerce in the 15th century, and why Catalan commercial and economic power waned in the later 15th century. To what extent did the economic policies of Castile, both before and after Spanish unification (1492) play in the decline of Catalan economic power.
4. What advances in shipbuilding, maritime navigation, and cartography made possible and promoted the new age of Overseas Expansion, from the early fifteenth century?
5. Describe and explain the importance of the following, in ship design and shipbuilding in the 15th century: the cog, lateen sails, the caravel, the new 'Atlantic ship' and the carrack. What economies of scale and what reductions in transportation and transaction costs did they achieve in the course of the 15th century?
6. What advances did western Europe make in naval artillery in the 15th century? Were Asian powers able to compete with western European military power in the 16th century?
7. Who was Prince Henry the Navigator, and what was his importance in inaugurating the age of Overseas of Exploration and Expansion?
8. Why in particular was the small, economically underdeveloped (or 'backward') nation of Portugal the first, as a nation, to engage in overseas exploration, expansion, and colonization?
9. What conflicts arose between Portugal and Spain (Castile and Aragon before the 1492 unification) in these processes of overseas expansion and colonization, particularly concerning West Africa and the Atlantic Islands; and how were they finally resolved?
10. What was the importance of the Atlantic Islands (Madeira, the Canaries, the Azores) for Iberian and western European overseas expansion?
11. Explain the events that led the Portuguese to discover a sea route to explore, trade with, and colonize parts of West Africa in the 15th century?
12. Explain the importance of the following in Portuguese explorations, trade, and colonization: gold, spices, sugar, and slaves. Analyze the economic relations of the Portuguese with the west African states (in the Senegal, Niger, and Volta river systems).
13. Discuss the changing importance of the Mediterranean spice trades in the 15th century, and the events that led the Portuguese to seek and then establish a direct sea route to India by the end of the 15th

century.

14. Discuss the roles of Bartholmew Dias and Vasco da Gama. When Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut, why did he purportedly say that he came 'in search of Christians and spices'? Who was Prester John, and what was his mythical importance in this era?
15. How did the Portuguese establish their Empire in the Indian Ocean, and how did they seek to gain control over the Asian spice trades? Why did they fail in this attempt, and how did they come to lose their Indian Ocean Empire: in particular to the Dutch and the English.
16. Why did the Portuguese establish their west European spice staple at Antwerp at the beginning of the 16th century: i.e. explain the importance of Antwerp for the spice trade
17. How did Venice regain control of much of the spice trade during the later 16th century; and how did Venice finally lose control over that most lucrative trade by the early 17th century?.
18. Compare the importance of the Indonesian archipelago, Malaysia, and the Indian subcontinent (with Ceylon) for the commerce of the Portuguese and other West Europeans during the 16th and 17th centuries.
19. How and why did Christopher Columbus come to 'discover' the Americas in and after 1492? What led the Iberians to explore and colonize the Americas in the 16th century?
20. How did the Americas come to be divided between Spain and Portugal -- and in particular why did the Portuguese colonize Brazil? What was the importance of Brazil for the west European economy?
21. How did the Spanish come to exploit the precious metal, and especially the silver resources of the Americas (in Mexico and 'Peru': i.e. Zacatecas and Potosi, the latter in modern day Bolivia)? What was the importance of that gold and silver for the West European and then the world economies in the 16th and 17th centuries? How important were they in financing European trade with Asia?
22. What other forms of commerce with the Americas did the Spanish come to develop in the 16th century.
23. Discuss the importance of sugar in the economic development of the Atlantic and Caribbean islands and of Brazil during the 16th and 17th centuries. What was the importance of sugar in European commerce during the 16th and 17th centuries?
24. How, why, and in what manner did the Spanish colonize the Caribbean Islands, Central, and South America in the 16th century?
25. What were the major factors involved in the decline of Spanish economic, political, and military power from the later 16th century, and especially by the mid-17th century?
26. Which European nations or powers principally gained from the decline of Portuguese and Spanish economic and military power?