

chapter 7

The Age of Expansion, Exploration, and Colonization, 1492–1787



The age of monarchy goes hand in hand with the age of exploration and colonization. While European monarchs vied with one another to establish strong nation-states in Europe, they also began sponsoring voyages of exploration beyond the known world. The purposes were fourfold: trade, conquest and expansion, religious conversion, and curiosity. The primary reason for their stupendous success can be summed up in one word: guns.

Europeans had long been trading with Asia, but the overland routes were problematic. Going over land, goods could not be transported any faster than a horse could walk; ships, by contrast, could move much more quickly, and a single ship could carry far more goods than a team of horses. Additionally, the overland routes were dangerous. Traders were constantly vulnerable to robbery and attack, weather caused problems at most times of the year, and geographical features such as mountains created obstacles to a smooth passage. All these

factors ate into profits and made the traders look around for water routes to Asia, since transport of goods by water was much easier, more efficient, and less hazardous.

The second motive was conquest and expansion. The story that has unfolded in the previous chapters of this book shows that European nations tended to have an aggressive foreign policy, constantly attacking one another in order to acquire valuable territory and expand their power bases. A larger population meant more revenue for the crown in taxes, more income for the Church in tithes, and more soldiers in the army. Therefore, three of the most powerful branches of society—the royal court, the clergy, and the military—were united in the desire to explore the seas and lands beyond Europe in the hope of establishing colonies that would make them richer and stronger than their neighbors.

The third motive, religious conversion, was a product of the universal Christian belief that non-Christians were heathens and that it was a Christian's duty to convert them, thus saving their souls from eternal damnation after death. Just as a nation is politically and economically stronger with a larger population, a church is stronger with more believers; therefore, the European churches were eager to send missionaries to Asia, Africa, and the Americas to bring more souls into the fold.

The last motive, and a very powerful one, was a sense of adventure and curiosity—the urge to find out what lay beyond the horizon and the willingness to take the risk of finding out. This urge has characterized human beings since the beginning of civilization and is responsible for all scientific discovery and technological achievement. Just as the twentieth-century explorations of outer space could not have been accomplished without the fundamental human desire to see and learn about the unknown, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century voyages of exploration could never have happened if a number of brave souls had not wanted to find out what was on the other side of the ocean.

Although the Chinese had invented gunpowder centuries before, there were no guns in the world that could match what the Europeans had developed by the 1500s. One of the most important axioms to understanding history is that in any conflict, the side with the greater firepower always wins. The Asians had much less sophisticated guns than the Europeans, and the Americans had no guns at all. This is almost certainly the main reason the Europeans were able to impose their will on the peoples of the other continents.

CHAPTER 7 OBJECTIVES

- Identify the motives that led European nations to begin exploring the world beyond Europe.
- Describe where the various European states established trade relations and colonies.
- Identify the major figures of the era and match each person to the geographical area he explored.

Chapter 7 Time Line

- 1487 Bartholomew Diaz rounds Cape of Good Hope
- 1492 Spanish-sponsored voyage of Columbus crosses Atlantic; begins cultural exchange
- 1497–99 Vasco da Gama reaches India
- 1513 Portuguese reach Southeast Asia
- 1517 Portuguese reach China
- 1539 Hernando de Soto explores southeastern North America
- 1565 Pedro Menendez de Áviles founds St. Augustine on Florida coast
- 1585 Raleigh establishes English colony on Roanoke Island, Virginia
- 1607 London Company establishes colony of Jamestown near Chesapeake Bay
- 1620 *Mayflower* reaches Cape Cod Bay; settlers sign Mayflower Compact
- 1629 Puritans found Massachusetts Bay Colony by royal charter
- 1776 British colonies in North America declare independence as United States of America
- 1781 Great Britain surrenders to United States at Yorktown

Exploration to the East

Europeans had been navigating the South Atlantic and the Mediterranean since ancient times, but it was only in the late fifteenth century that they began to explore the west coast of Africa and to look for ways to reach China and India by water. Europeans had traveled far to the East during the Crusades of the Middle Ages; there had also been solitary travelers like Marco Polo who brought back fabulous tales of sophisticated Eastern civilizations and tangible samples of Eastern luxuries in the form of spices, silks, and porcelain. Such items—especially the spices, which not only improved the taste of food but also helped to preserve it in the age before refrigeration—were highly valued in Europe, commanding high prices because of their scarcity. All the European nations knew there was great profit to be made from overseas trade—if one could establish an easy, efficient, and economical route.

Portuguese Exploration and Trade

Portugal's long stretch of Atlantic coastline and its proximity to Africa placed it in an ideal geographical position to take the lead in these exploratory voyages. With the birth in 1394 of Prince Henry, Portugal also acquired the ideal sponsor for its seagoing ventures.

Prince Henry's passion for ships and the sea, and the skills he acquired in his favorite subject, gave him the nickname Prince Henry the Navigator. Since Henry was not the heir to Portugal's throne, he was free to indulge his time and money on ships and sailing. His fascination with the sea proved enormously profitable for the kingdom.

Henry oversaw and paid for the development of the caravel, a lighter, faster, and more maneuverable sailing ship than those generally used at the time. He sponsored exploratory voyages to West Africa and employed skilled cartographers to record the results. Henry's own considerable skills in navigation were hugely beneficial to the Portuguese fleet.

During the late 1400s, Portuguese explorers made a series of voyages along the west coast of Africa. Their purpose was to gather information and perhaps to set up trading posts; at this time there was no attempt at invasion or conquest. In 1487, one of these voyages stumbled accidentally on the only viable water route to the East.

Captain Bartholomew Diaz and his crew, having ventured almost to the southern tip of Africa, were blown off course during a storm. When the storm ended, Diaz realized that they had rounded Africa's southern tip, which he promptly named Cape of Storms; later it became known as the Cape of Good Hope. This voyage established the viability of sailing to Asia by rounding Africa. (The Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean and Red seas and thus provides a much shorter shipping route, was not built until the mid-nineteenth century. See Chapter 14.)

The Portuguese lost no time in fitting out ships for a trade expedition to Asia. In 1498, Vasco da Gama became the first European to reach India by sea. He learned two facts of major importance on this first encounter. First, the Indians showed no interest in the European goods Da Gama offered to barter for their spices; they wanted money. Second, Arab traders already had control of a thriving spice trade in the area. Da Gama understood that the Portuguese would have to drive the Arabs out if their own trade ambitions were to succeed.

When Da Gama returned to Europe and sold a shipload of Indian pepper for sixty times the price he paid for it, it was clear that the thunderstorm that sent Diaz's ship off course had been a great stroke of economic good fortune for Portugal.

As a small nation with a small population, Portugal was interested not in conquest but in trade. At this point in history, the Portuguese made no attempt to invade or colonize African or Asian nations. Their goals were commercial: to establish permanent trading posts with small staffs and to make money. Their first trading post in the area was in Calicut at the southern tip of India. In 1510, they managed to oust the Arab traders and establish their own presence in Malacca (on the Malay peninsula) and Goa (on India's west coast). Arab traders would continue to operate in the area, but on a smaller scale; they were especially successful in continuing their trade with Venice, to which their ships had easy access via the Adriatic Sea.

During the 1540s, Portugal became the first European nation to make direct contact by sea with Japan, and by the 1550s the Portuguese had set up trading posts in China and throughout the Southeast Asian islands. In addition to purchasing Asian goods for export to Europe, the Portuguese made a handsome profit by carrying goods between Asian nations that traded with one another, such as China and Japan.

Dutch Trade

Like Portugal, the Netherlands was a small nation; without the large armies of the great powers like France, it had concentrated on economy rather than foreign policy. By the turn of the seventeenth century, the Dutch had developed Europe's most substantial sailing fleet.

The first Dutch voyage to the East took place in 1595; it returned more than two years later with a cargo that made huge profits, showing the Dutch that shipping trade in this area was financially viable.

It was not long before the Dutch gained the upper hand over the Portuguese in trade with the East. The Dutch had larger ships; in addition, they did not carry guns, which left more room for cargo. They also had superior trade goods to offer the Indians and Chinese in exchange for their wares.

In 1602, the Dutch East India Company was founded. It sold shares of stock and offered the investors a regular return on the profits. As the Portuguese had done before them, the Dutch earned a large profit not only on trade between Asia and Europe but also by serving as carriers of goods in the lively inter-Asian trade.

On the European mainland, Spain was trying to subdue the Netherlands; since Portugal and Spain were allies, this gave the Dutch the excuse to attack Portuguese ships and strongholds in the East. By the mid-seventeenth century, when Spain finally recognized Dutch independence, the Dutch had ousted the Portuguese from all their trading posts in the Indian Ocean, Indonesia, and the China seas.

Exploration to the West

Europeans were unaware of the existence of the Americas and the Pacific Ocean when they first considered sailing westward to reach the East. When they reached the western hemisphere at the end of the fifteenth century, they began a new era of colonization and cultural exchange.

Spanish and Portuguese Exploration

The race for American colonies and the continuing cultural exchange between the Americas and Europe began in 1492, when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean with a fleet of three ships. Columbus, an Italian sponsored by the Spanish monarchy, had sailed forth looking for the elusive trade route to India and China. He reasoned that since the world was spherical, one should be

able to reach the East by sailing west. There was only one flaw in his theory; the existence of the Americas and the Pacific Ocean lay between Europe and Asia.

In his four voyages to the Caribbean, Columbus claimed Cuba, Hispaniola, Antigua, and the Bahamas for Spain, establishing a base of operations for the Spanish explorers who followed him. The islands are called the “West Indies” because Columbus never realized that he had not in fact reached India; the misnomer “Indians” has stuck to the earliest inhabitants of the Americas ever since.

When Columbus returned safely to Spain from his first voyage, bringing with him gold nuggets, Caribbean plants, and several Taino people, word spread throughout Europe. Many other explorers were curious to see the “new world,” and the monarchs of Europe realized that by sponsoring explorers, they could establish colonies and expand their power bases abroad. Missionaries were also pleased at the discovery that there were whole societies of people they could try to convert to Christianity.

In 1500, the Portuguese landed in South America where they would establish a vast, profitable colony called Brazil. In 1513, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa sailed to Panama, crossed the isthmus, and became the first European to see the Pacific Ocean. In 1519, Ferdinand Magellan of Portugal sailed all the way around South America and continued on to the west. Magellan died in the Philippines, but thirty-five of his crew returned safely, having circled the globe. This voyage established that it was indeed possible to reach Asia by sailing west.

Between 1519 and 1531, the Spaniards defeated the mighty Aztec and Inca armies of Mexico and Peru. The great wealth they seized fired the imaginations of explorers such as Juan Ponce de Leon and Hernando de Soto, who sailed to North America in search of similar wealth. These men are known to history by the romantic name of *conquistadors*, a word that celebrates their adventurous spirit and undoubted bravery while minimizing the fact that they were motivated by greed and behaved brutally to those whose lands they invaded.

The conquistadors explored the Southeast and Southwest of North America, failing to find any evidence of gold. None of them realized at the time that the wealth of North America was in its natural resources: timber, fruit, vegetables, a mild seasonal climate, and fertile land.

In 1565, Pedro Menendez de Áviles established the first permanent European colony in North America when he founded the city of St. Augustine, Florida. The Spaniards began to settle Texas in the late 1600s and California in the mid-1700s. At one time, Spain claimed almost two-thirds of what is now the United States.

By the 1770s Spain was reaping an enormous profit from its colonies. The Spaniards had organized their territory into the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, which were broken down into smaller, locally administered units. Spain controlled the wealth of the colonial gold and silver mines, with the crown taking a one-fifth share of the profits. In addition, the colonists were banned from trading with any nations besides Spain.

Naturally, the Spaniards and Portuguese exploited the native populations for the purposes of labor. Conditions were little better than chattel slavery at first; like all people in positions of economic power throughout history, the masters and owners paid the workers as little as possible and curtailed their freedoms as much as they could. Under political and religious pressures from Europe, and thanks in large part to the protests of the influential Catholic missionary Bartolomeo de las Casas, working conditions eventually improved somewhat.

European invasion was catastrophic for the native populations of Latin America. Their empires were destroyed, their cultures all but obliterated, and their people enslaved in backbreaking, dangerous jobs in mines and plantation fields. The American population dropped drastically after the invasion; many were killed in armed conflict, but the vast majority succumbed to European diseases like smallpox. Never having been exposed to these diseases, the Americans had no natural resistance.

With the native workforce dying by the thousands, the Spaniards had to find another source of labor. This was the beginning of the slave trade between Africa and the Americas; it would continue for nearly three hundred years.

The European Impact on Latin America

- 1492 Columbus claims Cuba, Hispaniola (later Haiti/Dominican Republic), and Bahamas for Spain
- 1493 Columbus claims Antigua for Spain
- 1494 Spaniards begin rule of Jamaica
- 1498 Columbus discovers Venezuela
- 1500 Pedro Alvarez Cabral of Portugal arrives on coast of Brazil; by 1540 area develops into large-scale exporter of sugar
- 1501 Spanish reach Panama
- 1510 Vasco Nuñez de Balboa returns to Panama

- 1519 Pedro Arias Dávila founds Panama City; Panama becomes part of viceroyalty of New Granada after 1739
- 1519 Hernán Cortez invades Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City) and captures from Aztecs by 1521
- 1524 Spaniards invade Guatemala (heart of the Maya civilization) and Costa Rica; establish Spanish Kingdom of Guatemala
- 1532 Francisco Pizarro conquers Incas in Ecuador and Peru; founds Lima in 1535
- 1535 Cortez proclaims viceroyalty of New Spain (includes Mexico and parts of what will eventually become U.S.A.)
- 1536 Pedro de Mendoza founds Buenos Aires
- 1536 Spaniards found city of Valparaiso
- 1537 Spaniards enter Paraguay
- 1538 Spanish establish Sucre in present-day Bolivia, then called Upper Peru
- 1538 Spaniards establish colony of New Granada, which includes Bogotá
- 1541 Spaniards found Santiago, Chile
- 1544 Viceroyalty of Peru is established; includes Buenos Aires, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia
- 1545 Spanish establish Potosí in present-day Bolivia, then called Upper Peru; this area becomes important for silver mining, later tin
- 1550 Spaniards found city of Concepción, Chile
- 1620s British annex Barbados, colonize Bahamas
- 1632 British settle Antigua
- 1655 British take Jamaica from Spain
- 1697 Haiti ceded from Spain to France
- 1763 British take over Dominica
- 1776 Viceroyalty of La Plata is established; includes Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay

French Exploration

The French began their voyages to America for business reasons: they wanted to expand the fur trade. Giovanni da Verrazano in 1524 and Jacques Cartier in 1535 were the first Frenchmen to explore any part of North America. It took until 1603 for the French to establish their first American colony, when a party of fur traders traveled west to Canada. Samuel de Champlain went with the party as mapmaker. He mapped the St. Lawrence River and the Atlantic coast. Champlain founded the towns of Port Royal and Quebec. He established friendly relations with the Algonquin and Huron Indians; this friendship led to an important alliance of forces during the French and Indian War.

In 1615, Champlain became the first European to see the Great Lakes. This area became the hub of the French fur-trading industry. As the French prospered, they explored farther south. They settled parts of Ohio and sailed down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, where René-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle founded the colony of Louisiana.

English Exploration

The earliest English voyages to the west were made in search of a trade route to Asia; the elusive Northwest Passage. In 1497, John Cabot landed on the coast of Maine, becoming the first European since Leif Erikson (a Norseman who had reached the coast of Canada about five hundred years earlier) to see North America. It was Cabot's voyage that assured Europeans that they had stumbled across a new continent: America was clearly not Asia.

Cabot never returned from a second voyage. His son Sebastian followed him in 1508, reaching the entrance to Hudson Bay. In 1509 Henry Hudson found the mouth of the Hudson River and followed it north to Albany before he realized it led north, not west. On a second voyage, Hudson drove his crew farther and farther west through a network of islands north of Canada. Terrified for their lives in the unknown, frigid waters, Hudson's crew marooned him and turned the ship back east toward safety.

England's interest in acquiring colonies arose when Elizabeth I realized that Spain and France were establishing a foothold in the Americas. During the 1560s, English pirate ships began venturing into the Atlantic to capture Spanish cargoes (see Chapter 4). Cousins John Hawkins and Francis Drake were especially successful; Drake became the first Englishman to sail around the globe, and he was knighted on his return to England in 1580. This gesture on

the queen's part was one of the sparks that set off the great naval battle with the Spanish Armada in 1588 (see Chapter 4).

England joined the North American land grab by sending Sir Walter Raleigh west in 1584 to claim a large territory that included the present-day states of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas. Raleigh named the territory Virginia, in honor of Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen.

Raleigh and his companions established a town on Roanoke Island, off present-day North Carolina. A second group of settlers sailed west for Roanoke the following year, led by John White, who immediately returned to England for supplies. When White sailed back to the colony in 1590, he found no trace of the settlement he had left behind. No one knows to this day what became of the settlers of Roanoke.

This failure did not discourage the English from trying. Their first success was the Chesapeake Bay colony of Jamestown, founded in 1606. By 1638, England had founded seven colonies along the Atlantic coast. As the American population grew, the colonies began to expand westward, carrying out the commands of their royal charters.

Conflict

Conflict broke out between the British and French when each side wanted to stop the other from expanding its colonial territory. Both the French and the British claimed the Ohio River valley. The French built Fort Duquesne where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio. The British governor of Virginia appointed nineteen-year-old George Washington to deliver a letter warning the French to leave British territory. The French laughed in Washington's face, and when British troops attacked them, the French won the first encounter. This took place in 1754. The end to conflict was only temporary. It soon broke out again in what would be known as the French and Indian War.

In Europe, Britain and Prussia banded together against France and Austria. Soon Sweden, Russia, and various small, independent states in central Europe joined the war on the French side. The goal of this alliance was to invade and defeat Prussia. This aspect of the French and Indian War, fought on the European continent, is called the Seven Years' War; it lasted from 1756 to 1763. Together, the two wars are often referred to as the Great War for Empire.

In the end, Prussia was able to hold its ground against invasion and conquest, thanks to the strength of its British ally.

Results

Fighting in the colonies ended in 1761. Representatives of France and Britain signed the Treaty of Paris in 1763. France had lost much of its fleet in the fighting, and it gave up almost all its North American possessions. Canada and all holdings east of the Mississippi River (except New Orleans) were ceded to Britain, and all territory west of the Mississippi was ceded to Spain. This would prevent an immediate British takeover of the entire continent.

Britain had also gained a prize of enormous value in natural resources, as well as a prosperous colonial economy. However, Britain had spent vast sums of money on the war and now needed to tax the colonies to pay for it. In the end, of course, this British attempt to force the colonists to bear the burden of the war debt led to the colonies' declaration of independence from Britain and the creation of the United States of America. Britain surrendered to the US army in 1789 and withdrew from North America, maintaining only its connection with Canada, which would become an independent nation in 1867.

QUIZ

- 1. The term *Northwest Passage* refers to**
 - A. the overland route that traders traveled between Europe and Asia.
 - B. Ferdinand Magellan's voyage around the world.
 - C. the English Channel that separates England from France.
 - D. a trade route that would lead west from Europe to Asia by water.
- 2. _____ is an important historical figure because his voyage west initiated a major cultural exchange between Europe and the Americas.**
 - A. Jacques Cartier
 - B. Christopher Columbus
 - C. Hernando de Soto
 - D. Sir Walter Raleigh
- 3. Which European nation was the first to establish colonies in North America?**
 - A. England
 - B. France
 - C. Portugal
 - D. Spain

4. Their _____ enabled the Dutch to supplant the Portuguese in Asian trade.
- larger ships
 - stronger military
 - more-enlightened monarch
 - earlier success
5. Spanish explorers were initially disappointed with North America because they failed to find
- fertile land.
 - Indians.
 - gold.
 - fresh water.
6. In 1754, war broke out between the British and French over
- control of the fur trade.
 - treatment of the Indians.
 - religious differences.
 - territorial expansion.
7. _____ was the first man to claim North American territory for England.
- Sebastian Cabot
 - Henry Hudson
 - Sir Walter Raleigh
 - John White
8. The 1497 voyage of _____ assured Europeans they had found not “the Indies,” but a new continent.
- John Cabot
 - Christopher Columbus
 - Giovanni da Verrazano
 - Pedro Menendez de Áviles
9. Portugal was in an ideal position to explore the African coast because
- it wanted to build up its colonial empire.
 - it was the most powerful nation in Europe.
 - it was geographically close to Africa.
 - it could always count on support from Spain.

10. Portugal's most important goal on its voyages to Asia was
- A. establishing trade relations.
 - B. annexing territory.
 - C. military conquest.
 - D. converting the Asians to Christianity.