Chapter 23
Transoceanic Encounters and Global Connections

Themes

If you are very familiar with the European history, it could also make sense to teach chapter 24 (The Transformation of Europe) before teaching these explorations, since the organized governments, enthusiastic and aggressive Christian sects, and pre-capitalist economies were preconditions to launching her explorations. And if you are very comfortable with this material, you could combine chapters 23 and 24 into one unit, with abbreviated reading in both chapters, covering the “basics” in lecture formats. If you are not familiar with this history, combining the chapters might be problematic, because there is a lot of information that can easily become overwhelming.

The themes of this chapter revolve around the European maritime explorations, including motives, technologies, findings, and affects both at home in Europe and in foreign lands. (Leave the discussion of the Seven Years’ War to a later chapter.)

The motives are easily discussed and include the desire for basic resources and land on which to grow foods, particularly by the Portuguese; the desire for new maritime trade routes to Asia as the traditional land routes had become unsafe; and the zeal of Christian missionaries to convert new peoples. A discussion of the sailing and mapping technologies that were both necessary and available highlights the gradual accumulation of technological knowledge in the eastern hemisphere. You should also include a discussion of how these very expensive adventures were funded and the beginnings of the joint-stock companies, in which governments and private investors combined resources and shared risk and profit.

The Europeans learned how to sail, map, and return home from their voyages across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans and then set about figuring out how to profit from the lands they had “discovered.” First the Portuguese and then the British (through the British East Indies Company – BEIC) and the Dutch (through the Dutch East Indies Company – VOC) were able to set up trading-post empires in large part because of their military technology (they wanted trade, not direct control, of ports between west Africa and east Asia). The BEIC and the VOC realized fantastic profits for their investors, particularly from southeast Asian spices. The Russians, however, explored and conquered Siberia and established the foundation of a massive land-based empire stretching across Eurasia, while the English also established settler colonies in North America. The Spanish claimed access to the Philippine Islands, and with her Manila galleons, used them to transfer Spanish-Mexican silver to China, which in turn fueled the massive Chinese economy.

The histories of the English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese in the Americas are found in chapter 25, somewhat awkwardly. This chapter (23) deals with the “big picture” of European explorations, and brushes quickly past most specifics.

The final major theme is the Columbian Exchange. It’s hard to overemphasize how important this concept has become in World History. The transmission of diseases, plants, livestock, and human migrants from Eurasia into the previously-isolated Americas and Oceania fundamentally changed these environments, as well as effectively decimated the native populations. The new foods from the Americas, however, fueled huge population increases in Eurasia and Africa. The global trade that was created by these explorations further amplified the effects of the “Columbian exchange.” Fur-bearing animals were hunted to near extinction,
forests were razed for ship timbers, slaves were shipped across oceans, and previously unconnected populations became economically dependent upon each other.

Class/Thematic Topics

1. Status Quo, ca. 1450: Reestablish the major Eurasian empires and trade routes, and remind students of the dominance of the Chinese economy, the Indian ocean trade network, the silk roads, and the unrest and ultimate collapse of the Byzantine empire at the hands of the Ottoman Turks. Remind students that since the crusades, wealthy Europeans had access to spices, including sugar, from Asian markets, and that the collapse of the Byzantine empire affected these trade routes. Remind students of the long list of maritime explorations that preceded the 15th-century Europeans. You can go back and pick up the basics from the Polynesians in the Pacific, the Vikings in the Atlantic, and the Arabs, Indians, and Chinese in the Indian Ocean. The Europeans were not the first people to sail into the oceans. Explain the state of geographic knowledge in the 15th century, including the fact that educated people knew the world was round and knew its approximate circumference (since the Greeks, Erastothenes, ca. 200 B.C.E.); the assumption was that there was one ocean that wrapped around the “backside” of the globe; and that the Eurasian and African land masses were the only land masses on the planet.1 A copy of a Ptolemaic map would be a nice visual. It would be helpful to explain the ocean-going technologies available to sailors, ranging from maps that could only calculate latitude, to magnetic compasses, star charts, and lateen sails. This is probably all you can accomplish in one lecture, but it sets the historical scene, landscape and seascape, for the Europeans in the 15th century.

2. Remind students that the Atlantic Ocean had always been there, and ask them why the Europeans went exploring in the 15th century. As a discussion hook to get to these answers, a useful analogy for students is that the 15th-century maritime explorations were the equivalent of a 21st-century space program. Ask students if they expect a certain war-ravaged country (Iraq) or an impoverished country (Bangladesh) or a country with a shaky government (Ukraine) to mount a space program any time soon. One hopes they will answer “no,” and that will lead to a discussion of “preconditions” of exploration often being peace, prosperity (wealthy investors), skilled and educated workers, and an organized (tax-collecting) government. NASA is, in essence, a joint-stock company in the 21st century! So, the analogy of 15th-century maritime expeditions and a 21st-century manned Mars expedition are rather similar in terms of expense, technological expertise, education, willingness to take risks, and a large factor of the “unknown.” List the main motives for maritime explorations. Then begin with the Portuguese and Prince Henry, then move to Columbus and Ferdinand and Isabella. Note the importance of the little island groups of Canaries, Cape Verde, and Azores. They will be used to grow sugarcane with nearby African slave labor, and also as the places from which to catch the westerlies across the Atlantic. Also note that Columbus took coconuts and Taino natives back to Madrid to prove he had arrived in the Indies. This sets up the idea for students that native peoples were seen as inferior by the Europeans. Set international

---

1 Granted, there weren’t that many educated people in Europe in the 15th century, but still, Columbus did not discover the world was round.
competition in motion, and get the English, French and Dutch into the picture. If students have a blank world map in front of them, they can map and label as the lecture progresses. Geography is essential here! This could be turned into a game of sorts. For example, given the map of the winds and currents on pages 602-3, how would they chart a path from Point A to Point B?

3. Once the Europeans had done their exploring, what did they do with the lands they “discovered,” or encountered, to use a more historically correct term? Look at the BEIC and the VOC as they replaced the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean basin, and look at the profits generated by the spice trades for public and private investors. You could highlight the trail of the American foodstuffs that were brought into Eurasia and Africa, something students don’t realize. It is important to point out the Manila galleons, since most students will assume the Columbian exchange only went across the Atlantic Ocean, when in fact it was a crucial link to Asia across the Pacific Ocean.

Student Activities

1. Have students read the introductory essay to Part V on pages 594-595. Have them take careful notes, and then have a discussion on the themes of this unit.

2. Since students will be reading the whole chapters of this unit (whereas perhaps they had skipped around chapters in the previous eras) students could outline/highlight/take notes on a small section of the reading (e.g. “Motives for Exploration” on pages 599-600) in order to understand how the authors organize their analysis.

3. Both the BEIC and the VOC have websites!

4. Have students consult the PSI website (www.mhhe.com/psi) various primary sources and photographs of explorations and reactions to the conquered peoples of the Americas.

Geography Skills

1. Have students consult the PSI website (www.mhhe.com/psi) for a series of comparative maps.

2. Map any explorer’s route, labeling winds as well as lands.

3. Map the locations of the trade goods that Europeans desired and acquired.

4. Students should locate the following places on a map:

   Portugal       Spain
   England       Netherlands
   Lisbon        Cape Verde Islands
   Azore Islands  Canary Islands
   Philippine Islands  Straits of Melaka
   Calicut       Ottoman empire
Cape of Good Hope         northeast trade winds
Westerlies                Siberia
Hawaiian Islands          Java

Historical Terms and Concepts to Know
*Who, what, where, why, when, how, so what?

Vasco Da Gama              lateen sails
compass, astrolabe         Bartolomeu Dias
Christopher Columbus       James Cook
circumnavigation           Vitus Bering
trading-post empires       English (or British) East India Co. (BEIC)
VOC                        Prince Henry the Navigator
“Columbian exchange”       Manila galleons

Timing
• Day 1: Setting the stage (landscapes and waterways)
• Days 2 & 3: Explorations and student mapping
• Day 4: “Columbian exchange” (video)
• Day 5: Profits from exploring
• Day 6: Map test or a chapter test
Quick Quiz

1. Ferdinand Magellan established an important trade route between Mexico and
   a. the Canary Islands.
   b. Spain.
   c. the Philippines.
   d. Hawai`i.
   e. Portugal.

2. Which of the following was not an advantage that the English and Dutch had over the
   Portuguese?
   a. they created joint-stock companies
   b. they were wealthier countries
   c. they had much better captains
   d. they had much larger populations
   e. they possessed faster, cheaper, and more powerful ships

3. In the long term, the Columbian exchange
   a. led to economic instability because of a glut of Chinese silver.
   b. increased world population because of the spread of new food crops.
   c. brought a lasting decline in population because of the ravages of diseases such as smallpox.
   d. had very little influence on world population figures.
   e. barely broke even financially.

4. The center of the Spanish commercial activity in Asia was
   a. Hawai`i.
   b. Melaka.
   c. Bombay.
   d. Batavia.
   e. Manila.

5. In order to take part in the global trade network, Russian merchants went to Siberia in a quest
   for
   a. silver
   b. copper
   c. iron
   d. furs
   e. gold

6. Under Spanish rule, the native population of a colony
   a. was pressured to convert to Roman Catholicism.
   b. converted almost exclusively to Islam.
   c. was encouraged to pursue a syncretic brand of Christianity.
   d. followed a classical European north-south Protestant-Catholic geographic split.
   e. was allowed to follow their own religious traditions.
7. By 1750, all parts of the world participated in a global trade network except
a. Africa.
b. Australia.
c. South America.
d. India.
e. China.

8. In their attempt to control the spice trade in the Indian Ocean, the Europeans during the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries
a. used an alliance with southern Indian princes to achieve success.
b. achieved a monopoly.
c. met with limited success because of a lack of personnel and technology.
d. used their seemingly godlike advantage in technology to establish a theocracy.
e. were never able to displace the Chinese monopoly.

9. Portugal was unable to maintain its early domination of trade because
a. the Portuguese tired of the expenses of naval exploration and focused on their European land empire.
b. a Chinese resurgence of naval exploration forced the Portuguese out.
c. a late outbreak of the bubonic plague in the seventeenth century killed half the country's population.
d. they were unable to maintain the level of manpower necessary to maintain naval dominance.
e. the English, French, and Dutch formed a lasting alliance designed to force the Portuguese to surrender.

10. Which of the following was not one of the main inspirations for European exploration?
  a. the desire to spread Christianity
  b. the desire to establish new trade routes to Asian markets
  c. the desire to conquer China and India
  d. the search for basic resources
  e. the search for lands suitable for cultivation