

EARLY EUROPEAN EXPLORATION

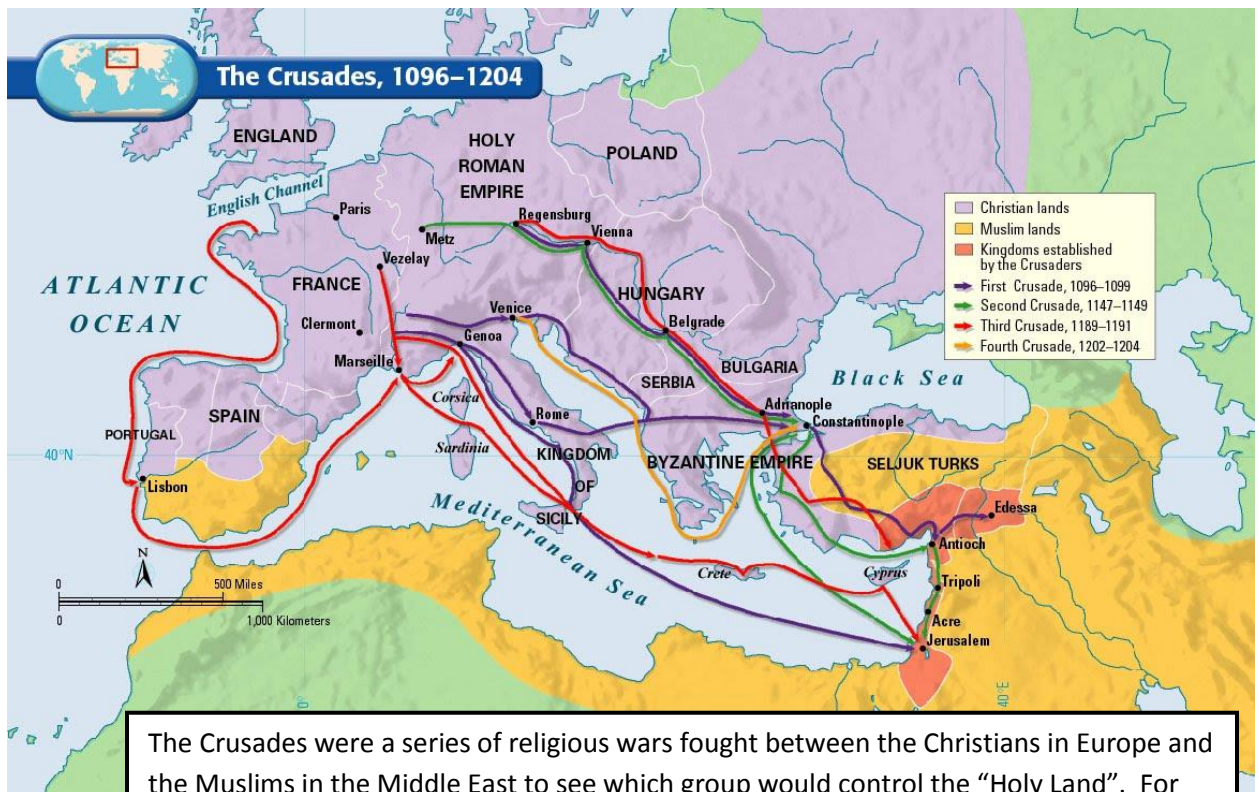
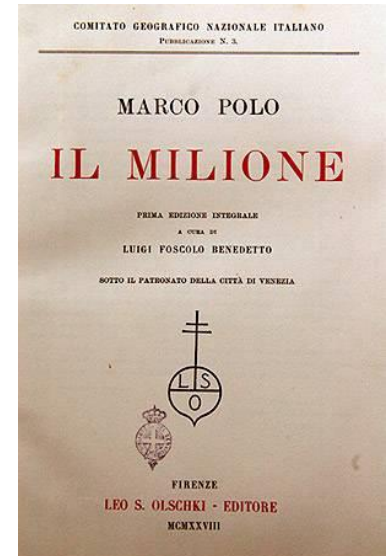
Why did European exploration begin to flourish in the 1400s? Europeans of this time had several motives for exploring the world. Advances in knowledge and *technology* helped make voyages of discovery possible.

Motives for Exploration

For early explorers, one of the main motives for exploration was the desire to find new *trade* routes to Asia. Marco Polo was one of the first explorers to head into Asia. He spent 15 years travelling throughout China and other parts of Asia before returning to Italy in 1295. He brought back many stories of the riches and exotic places of Asia and a book about his travels, *Il Milione* (“*The Million*”), was dictated, copied by hand and embellished many times over. Explorers knew very little about Asia and they had no idea that the Western Hemisphere (the Americas) even existed.

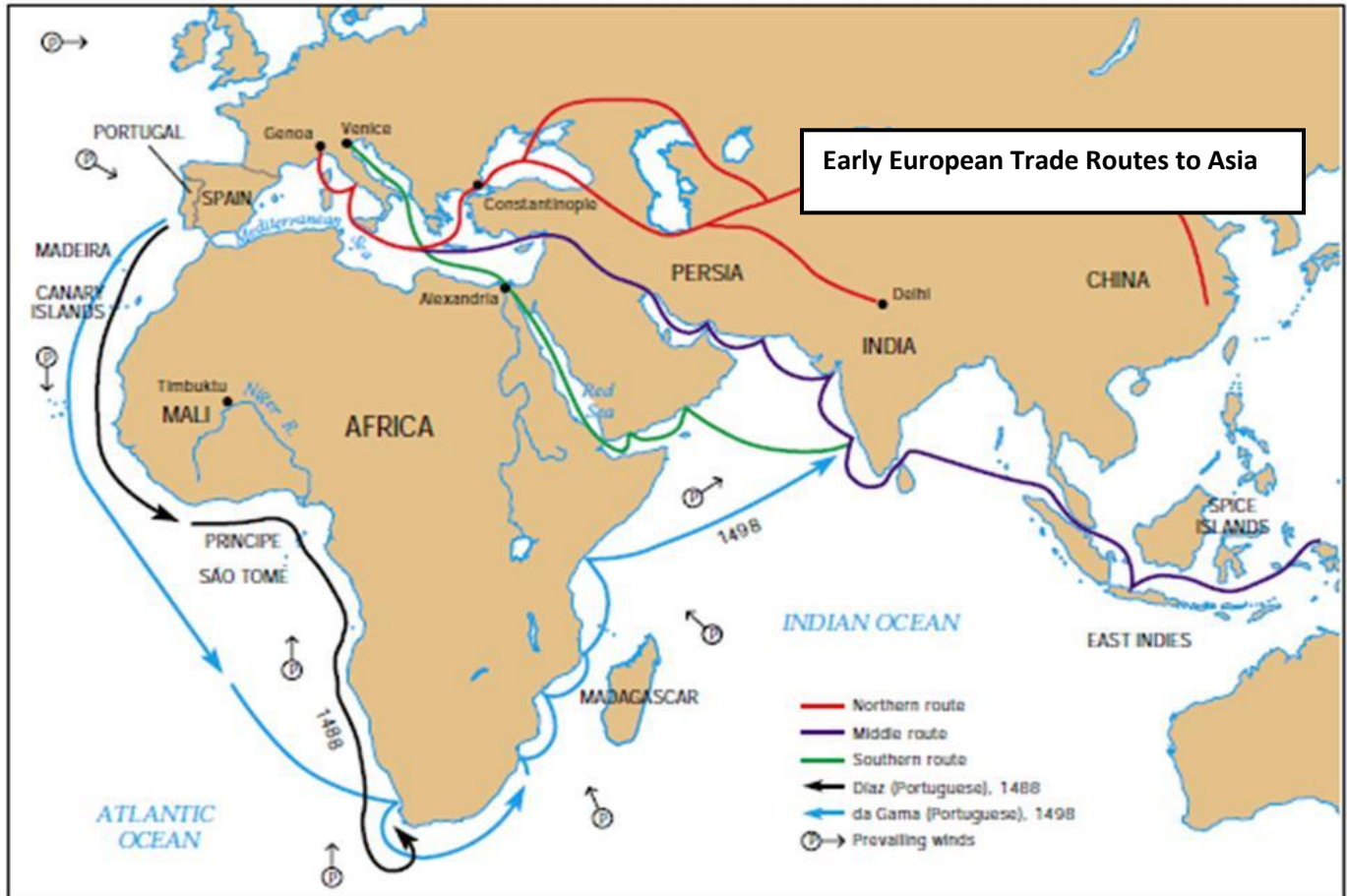
By the 1400s, merchants (businessmen) and crusaders (religious warriors who fought against Muslims in the Middle East) had brought many goods to Europe from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Demand for these goods was high and much money could be made by trading them. Europeans were especially interested in spices from Asia. They had learned to use spices to help preserve food during winter and to cover up the taste of food that was no longer fresh. Trade with the East, however, was expensive and difficult.

Muslims and Italians controlled the flow of trade. Muslim traders carried goods to the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Italian merchants then brought the goods to Europe. Problems arose when



The Crusades were a series of religious wars fought between the Christians in Europe and the Muslims in the Middle East to see which group would control the “Holy Land”. For many Crusaders, this was the first time they ever left their towns and villages in Europe.

Muslim rulers sometimes closed the trade routes from Asia to Europe. People in Europe wanted these goods and were willing to pay for them. So how could these items reach Europe if the existing trade routes were closed? If another way could be found, those traders and merchants would have an advantage over their competitors. Also, when the goods went through many hands, each trading party raised their price. By the time the item reached someone in Europe, the price was usually very expensive. European kings and merchants wanted to break the hold that Muslims and Italians had on trade. One way to do so was to find a sea route to Asia.



Other motives also came into play. Many people were excited by the opportunity for new knowledge. Explorers saw the chance to earn fame and glory as well as wealth if they could discover a newer, faster route to Asia. Some individuals craved adventure and as new lands were discovered, nations wanted to claim the lands' riches and *natural resources* for themselves.

A final motive for exploration was the desire to spread Christianity. Both Protestant (a sect of Christianity) and Catholic (another sect of Christianity) nations were eager to make new converts (new followers to their religion). Missionaries (people who share their religious beliefs with others) followed the path blazed by explorers, sometimes using force to bring native peoples into their faiths.



Advances in Knowledge and Technology

The Age of Exploration began in the midst of the Renaissance (a French word meaning “rebirth”), a time of new learning. A number of advances made it easier for explorers to venture into the unknown. One key advance was in cartography, the art and science of mapmaking. In the early 1400s, an Italian scholar translated an ancient book called *Guide to Geography* from Greek into Latin. The book had been written by Ptolemy in the second century A.D. Printed copies of the book inspired new interest in cartography (map making). European mapmakers used Ptolemy’s work to draw more accurate maps. Discoveries by explorers gave mapmakers new information to work with. The result was a dramatic change in Europeans’ view of the world.

By the 1500s, globes showed Earth as a sphere, or ball. In 1507, a German cartographer made the first map that clearly showed North and South America separated from Asia. In turn, better maps helped explorers by making navigation easier. The most important Renaissance geographer, Gerardus Mercator, created maps using improved lines of longitude and latitude. Mercator’s mapmaking technique was a great help to navigators.

An improved ship design also helped explorers. By the 1400s, Portuguese and Spanish ship builders were making caravels. These ships were small, fast, and easy to maneuver. Their shallow bottoms made it easier for explorers to travel along coastlines where the water was not deep. Caravels also used lateen (triangular) sails, an idea borrowed from Muslim ships. These sails could be positioned to take advantage of the wind no matter which way it blew.

Along with better ships, new navigational tools helped sailors to travel more safely on the open seas. By the end of the 15th century, the compass was much improved. Sailors used compasses to find their bearing, or direction of travel. The astrolabe helped sailors figure out their distance north or south from the equator. Both of these instruments helped sailors have a more accurate idea of their absolute location on the open sea.

Finally, improved weapons gave Europeans a huge advantage over the people they met in their explorations. Sailors could fire their cannons at targets near the shore without leaving their ships. On land, the weapons of native peoples often were no match for European guns, armor, and horses.



DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTION WITH YOUR “SHOULDER PARTNER” WHEN EVERYONE HAS FINISHED READING:

Do you think European countries cooperated with each other and shared information about the new trade routes they were exploring to find the fastest route to Asia? Why or why not?

Written Response Questions:

Make sure your answers are thorough and thoughtful. Use evidence from the reading to support your answers. Of course, write in complete sentences!

1. How do you think the exaggerated book about Marco Polo's travels (*Il Milione*) and the stories returning Crusaders had of the Middle East might have influenced other Europeans to explore the known world and find newer, faster trade routes to Asia?
2. Explorers were often described as looking for "God, Gold and Glory." Fully describe what is meant by each word based on what you read today.

3. Which motive (which of the three “G’s”) do you think was the strongest for encouraging European exploration? Why?
4. Explain how advanced knowledge and *technology* helped increase European exploration.
5. Do you believe the European Age of Exploration would have been possible without the invention of the *printing press*? Explain and support your answer with evidence.