

DBQ: The European Age of Exploration

Historical Context:

Until about 1450, Europe was mostly cut off and isolated from the **Silk Roads**. Without access to the wealth, trade goods, technologies, and ideas that travelled from China, India, the Middle East, and North Africa, Europeans lived in the “**Dark Ages**.” This meant that the European economy was based on agriculture alone (**Manor System**), European politics were decentralized (**Feudalism**), and life was poor and hard for the majority of people. The only cultural unity and comfort provided to Europeans came from the **Catholic Church**, which established common religious laws and gave people hope in salvation.

A few events began to change the direction of European history and eventually allow Europeans to dominate global trade. The first was the **Black Death**, or the Plague, which came to Europe through trade routes in 1348. While at first this caused an obsession with death (**gothic** culture) and was devastating to the European population, in the long-term this disease actually allowed survivors a better standard of living. Wages and salaries rose as survivors had less competition for jobs. The next major turning point was the **Fall of Constantinople** (or the Fall of the Byzantine Empire) in 1453, when the **Ottoman Empire** (Islamic) invaded. While at first this represented a huge defeat for Christianity and blocked off Europe from any access it had to the Silk Roads, in the long-term it would force Europeans to find wealth somewhere else.

Up until 1453 only the city-states of the **Italian Peninsula** had any access to the wealth and trade of the Silk Roads. After 1453 it would be up to innovative and risk-taking adventurers to bring Europe out of the Dark Ages and into a Golden Age (the **Renaissance**). The series of voyages and expeditions made by Europeans to link Europe to the global trade and wealth of the east would be known as **The Age of Exploration**.

- **Part A:** Examine each document carefully, and answer the questions that follow on your chart.

Document 1

Source: Historian John P. McKay describes the impact of the Fall of Constantinople (1453) on Europe and the role it played in causing the Age of Exploration in *A History of Western Society* 10th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011).

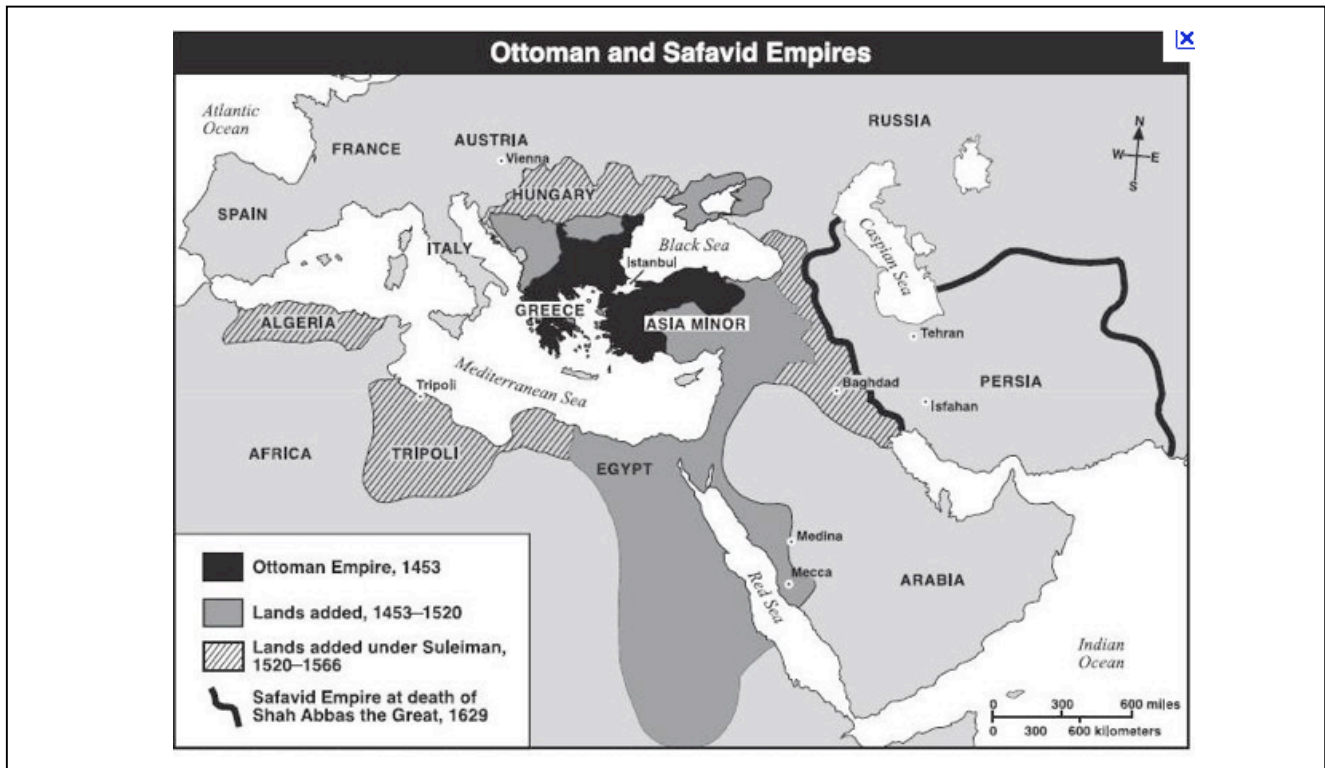
By the mid-sixteenth century Ottomans controlled the sea trade in the eastern Mediterranean, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the rest of North Africa, and their power extended into Europe as far west as Vienna.

Ottoman expansion frightened Europeans. The Ottoman armies seemed nearly invincible and the empire's desire for expansion limitless. In France in the sixteenth century, twice as many books were printed about the Turkish threat as about the American discoveries. The strength of the Ottomans helps explain some of the missionary fervor Christians brought to new territories. It also raised economic concerns. With trade routes to the east in the hands of the Ottomans, Europeans needed to find new trade routes.

1. According to the document, what important routes did the Ottoman Turks control, and why were they important to the Europeans?

Document 2

Source: A map of the Ottoman Empire and its growth after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. From Elisabeth Gaynor Ellis and Anthony Esler, *World History: Connections to Today* (Prentice Hall).



1. What areas did the Ottoman Turks have control over? Why were these areas important to trade for Europeans?

Document 3

Source: An excerpt from the journal of Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer who led voyages funded by the monarchs of Spain in 1492. Columbus sailed west from Spain in order to reach India while avoiding Africa. He died believing his men discovered a westward route to India, but in fact, landed in the Caribbean.

Your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians, and princes who love and promote the holy Christian faith, and are enemies of the doctrine of Mahomet [Mohammed], and of all idolatry and heresy, determined to send me, Christopher Columbus, to the above-mentioned countries of India, to see the said princes, people, and territories, and to learn their disposition and the proper method of converting them to our holy faith; and furthermore directed that I should not proceed by land to the East, as is customary, but by a Westerly route, in which direction we have hitherto no certain evidence that any one has gone. So after having expelled the Jews from your dominions, your Highnesses, in the same month of January, ordered me to proceed with a sufficient armament to the said regions of India, and for that purpose granted me great favors, and ennobled me that thenceforth I might call myself Don, and be High Admiral of the Sea, and perpetual Viceroy and Governor in all the islands and continents which I might discover and acquire, or which may hereafter be discovered and acquired in the ocean.

1. According to the line “to learn their disposition and the proper method of converting them to our holy faith”, what is Columbus suggesting be done with the native population they encounter?

Document 4

Source: Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer sent by the Kings of Portugal to find a sea route to India. In 1497 his boats rounded the Cape of Good Hope and reached Calicut (Calcutta), India on May 20, 1498.

1498. Calicut. [Arrival.] That night (May 20) we anchored two leagues from the city of Calicut...

On the following day (May 22) these same boats came alongside, when the captain-major sent one of the convicts to Calicut, and those with whom he went took him to two Moors (Muslims) from Tunis, who could speak Castilian and Genoese. The first greeting that he received was in these words: “May the Devil take thee! What brought you hither?” They asked what he sought so far way from home, and he told them that we came in search of Christians and of spices. They said: “Why does not the King of Castile, the King of France, or the Signoria of Venice send thither?” He said that the King of Portugal would not consent to their doing so, and they said he did the right thing. After this conversation they took him to their lodgings and gave him wheaten bread and honey. When he had eaten and returned to the ships, accompanied by one of the Moors, who was no sooner on board, then he said these words: “A lucky venture, a lucky venture! Plenty of rubies, plenty of emeralds! You owe great thanks to God, for having brought you to a country holding such riches!” We were greatly astonished to hear his talk, for we never expected to hear our language spoken so far away from Portugal.

1. What country is Vasco de Gama sailing for? What resources were they able to find in Calicut (Calcutta)?

Document 5

Source: "England's Treasure by Forraign Trade," written in 1664 by Thomas Mun, an English economist and mercantilist, describes the positive effects the Age of Exploration had on political centralization and power in Europe. The spelling is true to 17th century English.

Behold then the true form and worth of forraign trade, which is *The great Revenue of the King, The honour of the Kingdom, The Noble profession of the Merchant, The School of our Arts, The supply of our wants, The employment of our poor, The improvement of our Lands, The Nurcery of our Mariners, The walls of the Kingdoms, The means of our Treasure, The Sinnews of our wars, The terror of our Enemies*. For all which great and weighty reasons, do so many well-governed States highly countenance the profession, and carefully cherish the action, not only with Policy to encrease it, but also with power to protect it from all forraign injuries; because they know it is a Principal in Reason of State to maintain and defend that which doth Support them and their estates.

1. According to Mun, what were some of the benefits of foreign trade?

Document 6

Source: As European countries established colonies around the world, an exchange of trade goods across the Atlantic Ocean came to replace the Silk Roads. The trans-Atlantic trade network was known as the Columbian Exchange, after Christopher Columbus.



1. What continents began trading with each other because of the Columbian Exchange? Is the Columbian Exchange a result or cause of the Age of Exploration? How do you know?