

The growing spice trade

[Economics](#), [Trade](#)



According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, the word "trade" means a person engaged in an occupation, business, or industry dealings between persons or groups and the business of buying and selling or bartering commodities. Many factors played key roles in the economic development of a region using trade as a major contribution to growing power. There were many commodities that were traded; silk, fruits and vegetables, cotton, and precious stones, to name a few. The spice trade, in particular, was an activity with ancient origins. The spice trade was and is a commercial activity that involves the merchandising of spices and herbs. The most important item of trade between the East and West were spices, especially cinnamon from India, cardamom from Aden, cassia, turmeric, and ginger, and pepper from Indonesia. It bypassed silk and other commodities to be the main import from India to the western world. In addition to their use in cooking, spices were put to a variety of purposes, including medicine, magic, mummification, perfume, religion, and sex.

For many centuries, Arab merchants controlled the overland trade routes to India until the sea routes were discovered ("SPICES", n. d.). Overland routes helped the trade initially, but maritime routes led to tremendous growth later. During the high and late medieval periods, Muslim traders dominated maritime spice trading routes, tapping source regions in the Far East and shipping spices from trading emporiums in India westward to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, from which overland routes led to Europe. This trade was transformed by the European Age of Discovery and the route from Europe to the Indian Ocean via the Cape of Good Hope was pioneered by European navigators such as Vasco Da Gama in 1497. The high cost of

transportation ensured that the most costly goods like silk, spices, precious metals, and gems, traveled the longest distances. Most of the cargo carried in ancient trade went from Asia to Europe via overland and maritime.

Civilizations of Asia were involved in spice trade from ancient times, and the Greco-Roman world soon followed by trading along the Incense route and the Roman-India routes which were dependent upon the techniques developed by the maritime trading power, Kingdom of Axum. The Kingdom had pioneered the Red Sea route before the 1st century. Trade between India and the Greco-Roman world kept on increasing and the introduction of Indian culture created a demand for aromatics. These trading outposts later served the Chinese and Arab markets, too. Many other merchants and countries engaged in this trade such as the Pre-Islamic Meccans who continued to use the old Incense Route to benefit from the heavy Roman demand for luxury goods. The Indian commercial connection with South East Asia proved vital to the merchants of Arabia and Persia. The Abbasids used Alexandria, Damietta, Aden, and Siraf as entry ports to India and China.

Rome briefly played a part during the 5th century. One of the major consequences of the spice trade was the discovery of the American continent by European explorers. Trade until the mid 15th century was with the east through the Silk Road with the Byzantine Empire and the Italian city-states of Venice and Genoa acting as the middle man. In 1453, however, the Ottomans took Constantinople and so the Byzantine Empire was no more. Now in control of the sole spice trade, the empire was in a favorable position to charge hefty taxes on merchandise bound for the west. The Western Europeans set about to find another sea route around Africa. When

Christopher Columbus sailed west in 1492, he wasn't looking for a new world, but for a new route to the old world of the Indies and for gold and spices. He found little of either. After Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan in 1520 took up the quest for Spain. Of the five vessels under his command, only one, the Victoria, returned to Spain, laden with cloves. With this, Portugal and Spain developed new trade routes that bypassed the old land and water routes in the process opened up a new era of world trade. Conclusion What does this say about the growing globalization of trade and cultural exchange? Along the trade routes European people intermarried, passed on valuable technologies and skills, arts and literature, and cultural and religious customs. The sale of spice established large funds to be used to benefit local economies and promoting further trading activities.

Reference

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