



European Exploration and Discovery

TEACHERS NOTES

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Timemap can be used in two different ways:

- 1) as a whole-class presentation, using a whiteboard or projector, or
- 2) as a student-centred learning tool for individual or small group work.

What does this Timemap of contain?

The Timemap contains a sequence of maps showing the early European voyages of discovery. They start with the Portuguese voyages down the coast of Africa in the 15th century, and end with the Magellan expedition which circumnavigated the world in 1519-22. Their aim is to provide the historical background to the Age of Discovery.

At the start of the period covered, Europeans, most of whom were firmly entrenched in the limited cultural horizons of the Medieval period, had only the vaguest awareness of what lay beyond the borders of Christendom. By the end of it, European ships had circumnavigated the globe, and had discovered a vast landmass which was entirely new to them.

The main thrust of the module is that Christopher Columbus didn't just set sail one fine day and change the world. The world was already changing, and this was not down to just one individual, or one country – or even one continent! The Age of European Exploration rested on technological achievements from the Middle East (the astrolabe, the lateen sail) and China (the compass, gunpowder). However, it was distinctively European factors that led to a process of huge historical importance, in which these worldwide innovations did indeed change the world. This module seeks to introduce students to these issues. It also hopes to encourage them to think about the role of key individuals (were they key?) as against more general factors.

What is the Timemap's purpose?

In sum, the purpose of the Timemap is to give students an overall understanding of the early European Age of Discovery from the early 15th century down to the first circumnavigation of the world in 1519-22:

- What were the reasons for the Age of Discovery?
- Why were Spain and Portugal the pioneers?
- Who were the key personalities involved?
- Which were the key voyages?
- What technological and navigational challenges had to be overcome?
- What did the voyages actually achieve?

The maps have a considerable amount of information linked to them - more than is offered in most text books. This information is accessed by clicking on the "i" button, just below the date, and then clicking the hotspots which appear in the maps.

Also just below the date is a "Q". This button accesses one or more simple questions about that map. These questions are designed to encourage students to study the maps for the information they contain.

The Timemap is accompanied by these teachers' notes, which contain suggestions for using the resource with students (see below). These suggestions are also set out in a student's worksheet.

2. USE WITH STUDENTS

The Timemap can be used in one of two ways.

With the whole class

If a teacher wishes to acquaint students briefly with the topic before moving on to another topic in world history, then this Timemap is ideal. It makes a superb whiteboard resource, and can be used as a whole-class presentation. It offers an effective, visual overview of the origins and rise of Islam, and will give students a grasp of key events and developments.

As a student-based resource

This Timemap can be used as the main resource for a learning unit on the early history of Islam lasting several lessons. It has a large amount of information embedded in it - more than students will find in most text books - and is designed to be used by students, as individuals or in small groups, independently of the teacher.

The information is accessed by clicking on the "i" button, just below the date, and then clicking the hotspots which appear in the maps.

Also just below the date is a button labelled "Q". This button accesses one or more simple questions about the map - questions designed to get students looking at the information in the maps in a focussed way.

If your intention is to introduce your students to the origins and early history of Islam, then get them to work through the questions on the maps, either individually or in small groups.

These questions are ideal for bolstering students' knowledge about the topic.

If, however, you want students to look at the topic more deeply and more thoughtfully, then a series of suggested activities are set out below, section 3, and in the worksheet. These activities are designed to enhance students' historical understanding of such issues as chronology, change and continuity, causation, and interpretation.

If you do not have time for your students to tackle all these activities, choose one or more which are most appropriate to your students' abilities.

3. SUGGESTED STUDENT ACTIVITIES

The following activities are also set out in a Students' Worksheet, which accompanies these notes.

1. Chronological Activity

This simple exercise is designed to develop students' sense of chronology.

EITHER

Place the following in chronological order:

Vasco da Gama arrives in India
Magellan's voyage
The first voyage of Christopher Columbus
Bartholomew Diaz rounds the Cape
The Treaty of Tordessillas

OR

Draw a timeline of early European exploration.
Place key events on it.

No right answers here, but students have to give reasons for including or excluding events. A possible list might be:

Henry the Navigator sets up base at Sagres; Cape Badajoz is rounded; Cape Verde is rounded; Cape of Good Hope is rounded; Columbus' first voyage; Vasco da Gama arrives in India; the Treaty of Tordessillas; the founding of Portuguese Goa; Magellan's voyage.

2. Analysis

The purpose of this exercise is to encourage students to think about the nature of historical processes – and how that nature changes over time: different factors at play, different kinds of events, different results, and so on.

If you had to divide into two or more phases, where would you put the dividing line(s)?

Again, no right answers here, but students have to give reasons for their decision. One answer might be: Phase 1: – the Portuguese crawl down Africa; Phase 2 – the transoceanic voyages

What were the distinguishing characteristics of each phase?
What was achieved in each phase?

OR

The Portuguese probing down the African coast took several decades. Why did it take so long, when the following voyages which spanned the oceans happened so quickly?

3. Why did it happen?

Students of history should be aware that things don't just happen. Why things happen, and what they then lead to, is the very stuff of history. But the "why" is often quite a complex question - does it mean, "why did they do such and such?", or "how was it that they succeeded in doing such and such?"

List the various reasons given in the module for the rise of the Age of European Exploration.

Are the reasons given sufficient, do you think?

Can you think of any others there might have been?

In particular,

1) What was it about Europe at that time that made these voyages occur?

2) what was it about Portugal that made this small country the pioneer of exploration?

What do YOU think were the two most important causes for the European Age of Discovery?

4. "Know-how"

This question encourages students to think about the role of technology - as well as about global connections.

What new technologies became available prior to the voyages to make oceanic exploration possible?

Where did they come from – is it possible to claim that the Age of Exploration was purely a European achievement?

After the voyages of exploration had begun, what significance challenges had to be overcome? What were the key steps in overcoming these challenges?

5. Key personalities

This is another question about causation - and in particular the role played by individuals in the unfolding of history.

EITHER

Who, do you think, were the three most important figures in the early Age of Discovery?

What did each one contribute to the process of exploration?

What qualities did they display which helped them make their contribution?

What was it about these times (do you think) which threw up these people?

Which of these would have been the most famous at the time, do you think? Would he be regarded as the most important now? (If not, who?) Give reasons for your answers

OR

Look at one of the voyages of either da Gama or Magellan.

List some feature that this tells us about these early voyages of exploration.

How dangerous were they? (To help answer this, look at some other voyages as well.)

What qualities do you think the commanders of these expeditions needed?

OR

Would there have been an Age of Exploration if Prince Henry “The Navigator” hadn’t been born (or, very likely at that time, lived past his youth)?

6. Europe and China

This is an interesting - and difficult question - about causation, venturing into fields which professional historians find challenging.

Just before the Portuguese started on their long-distance voyages, a famous Chinese admiral had led a series of great expeditions across vast distances. His name was Zheng He.

Research the career and achievements of Cheng Ho.

List the similarities between his voyages and those of the Europeans.

List the differences.

Why (do you think) did Chinese exploration come to a stop, whilst European exploration did not?

What do the differences and similarities between Chinese and European exploration tell us about the differences and similarities between Europe and China at this period?

APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Timemap are to develop the following knowledge and skills in students:

Knowledge

The information about the early European Age of Exploration contained in this Timemap can provide:

- A "Big Picture" overview of the topic
- A more in-depth look at specific events and episodes - or in this case, voyages
- Key features of the period, including the ships used, the nature of the voyages and the motives of the explorers
- A focus on various strands (see below *)
- The impact of geography upon history, and in particular the various challenges that winds, currents and other geographical features posed
- The presence of global connections, apparent particularly in the technological package which made the voyages possible.

*The strands of history encountered in this Timemap are:

social & economic trends: the economic motives for the voyages of exploration, and the economic impact the discoveries had on Europe and the world

government: the way governments and diplomacy played a key role in the Age of Exploration

thought and religion: the European view of the world, most notably expressed in the Treaty of Tordesillas.

Skills

- The Timemap will give students a clear grasp of the Chronology of the Age of Exploration, up to the first circumnavigation of the globe
- The Causation - causes and consequences - of the Age of Exploration
- Opportunities are provided for students to offer their views of the significance of different explorers, and so introduce them to the issue of Interpretation in history.

APPENDIX B: Commentary of Maps

The following notes give background details to each map in the sequence. If you do not want to go into depth, and just give a brief overview of the topic, the first paragraph (in bold) for each date will give you a summary of the information.

Some questions are included for discussion.

Map 1: Europe c. 1400

In the late Middle Ages, Europeans knew very little about the wider world. Travellers such as Marco Polo had brought back reports of great civilizations in Asia, but the rise of the Ottoman empire meant that a great Muslim power was increasingly blocking Europeans from contact with peoples (and traders) further east.

Although Europeans were importing an increasing quantity of trade goods from Asia and Africa – spices, silks, cotton textiles and so on - this rich trade was not in European hands.

Spices in particular were items of great value to Europeans – they were used to make food taste better (though not to cover the smell of rotten food, as is sometimes claimed), and for medicines. A reliable supply was seen as a growing necessity as Europeans became wealthier and more people were able to afford them.

Europe was getting wealthier in the later Middle Ages. Trade was expanding, there was a rising demand for luxury goods, and the trade routes bringing commodities into Europe were getting busier. To the south and east these trade routes were in the hands of Muslims, between whom and Christian Europe lay a chasm of hostility. Therefore the only direction for expansion was the north and west – but here was the open sea. Already in the 14th century there were signs of the first probings into the wide ocean – the growing demand for fish was carrying French and English fishermen to the fishing grounds off the coast of North America, whilst sailors and traders (Arab first, European later) had been visiting the Canary Islands, off the coast of Africa, for 100 years or more.

The rise in wealth was accompanied by a new interest in learning. Arabic science and technology was becoming increasingly known in Europe, as was the learning of the ancient Greeks and Romans (often from Arabic sources). Europeans were becoming more and more thirsty for new knowledge, to know more about the world.

Portugal

Portugal was a small country on the south west coasts of Europe. It had a long sea coast, with plenty of good harbours; it produced plenty of good seamen. As a Christian country which had been carved out of Muslim territory during the Middle Ages. It therefore had a tradition of aggressive expansion into Muslim lands.

The Portuguese contact with Muslims was by no means all hostile. The Portuguese had been exposed to Islamic civilization for many centuries, and had a tradition of learning from their Muslim neighbours. Muslim mathematics, cartography, instrument-making, ship-design and navigation (including devices such as the astrolabe and quadrant) were to play a key part in the so-called European Age of Discovery.

In the late Middle Ages, the Portuguese were filled with a crusading spirit to spread the Christian faith and roll back the realm of Islam. They had heard rumours of a Christian king, "Prester John" ("John the Priest") who lived in the heart of Africa (rumours and fables of Christian kings and cities of gold were to play a large part in European expansion) – an alliance with him might help them in their fight against the Muslim powers. Also, the Portuguese shared in the expanding economic life of the Europe of the late 14th and 15th centuries, and were influenced by a growing commercial ambition. After their conquest of the North African town of Ceuta, they began to think about opening up Africa to Portuguese trade.

Finally, in the 15th century this small country was ruled by a remarkable royal family, whose members have since been known as "the Illustrious Generation"). The Portuguese royal court was a centre of European science and learning. The policies of the king and his advisors were aimed at controlling the North African coast, both to control the corsairs and to dominate trade; and they became increasingly aware of the possibilities of expansion further afield. The Portuguese kings saw in the expansion of trade and empire a means of gaining the wealth to balance the power of their powerful and rebellious nobility.

The member of this royal family whose name became best known in European history was not a king, but one of the princes – Prince Henry, "the Navigator".

He was determined to discover what lay to the south of the Sahara desert, and to see if there was a way around the south of Africa to the Spice Islands in the East. He set up his headquarters at Sagres, an isolated spot on the Atlantic coast, and attracted cartographers, instrument makers, astronomers and shipbuilders there.

He commissioned the early voyages of exploration.

NW African coast

The Atlantic coast of Africa going south from the Straits of Gibraltar is deserted and barren. There are no harbours to replenish supplies at. Also, the prevailing winds in that region are from the south west- which, in the days of sail, meant that a ship could fly down the coast to the south, but find it difficult if not impossible to get back home – not an attractive outlook for sailors.

Map 2: The Crawl down the coast

The Portuguese prince Henry the Navigator commissioned a series of expeditions into the Atlantic and down the coast of Africa, each one probing a little bit further. All the time these Portuguese explorers gathered more information about the African coast, as well as about long-distance navigation and oceanic winds and currents.

By the time of Henry's death these expeditions had proved that profit could be made by trade with the Africans, and so they continued, until at last the Portuguese sailor Bartholomew Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope.

NW African coast

One of the crucial things that the early Portuguese sailors discovered was that, whilst the winds along the coast were from the north west, making it slow and difficult (if not impossible) for sailing ships to battle against the wind back home again to Portugal, if one sailed further out into the Atlantic one could catch winds that went in the opposite direction – carrying the sailing ships northwards to European shores.

Cape of Good Hope

In 1488 Bartholomew Dias sailed round the Cape of Good Hope without seeing it – he only realised that he had done so when, sailing north, he made landfall at a coast facing east, not west.

This was a highly important moment for the Portuguese (and Europe) as it proved for the first time that the Indian Ocean and the lands to the east were accessible by sea from Europe. It opened the way to a radical re-drawing of trade routes between east and west.

Map 3: The New World

The rounding of the Cape of Good Hope by the Portuguese showed that trade with the East was possible by that route. Now, however, the Spanish began getting involved in exploration, trying to find a more direct way to Asia by heading straight across the Atlantic. The first of these expeditions, under Christopher Columbus, stumbled across a continent previously unknown to Europeans.

Spain had only become a united country after 1469, when queen Isabella of Castile married king Ferdinand of Aragon. These two monarchs set about

creating a strong, centralized nation-state, and in conquering the last Muslim state in Spain, Granada, thus bringing the entire country under their Christian rule.

As Portugal was seeking to outflank the Muslims in getting at the riches of the east, so it made sense for Spain to outflank Portugal in pioneering a shorter, more direct route to those same riches.

Apart from national rivalry, the Spanish shared many similar motivations for expansion as the Portuguese – a crusading tradition against non-Christian foes, exposure to Muslim pirate attack, but also centuries of exposure to Islamic science, geography and mathematics which made the inhabitants of this corner of Europe more capable of long-distant voyaging than the rest of Christendom.

Christopher Columbus

1451? - 1506

Christopher Columbus was a Genoese sailor who had spent many years lobbying the kings of Portugal and Spain for sponsorship to carry out an Atlantic crossing - his idea was that by going west you could come to the lands of the east much more quickly than going round the Cape of Good Hope.

He was finally successful in January 1492, and a small fleet of three ships left August 3rd 1492. On October 12 they sighted land. This was in the Bahamas (it's not known exactly where). Thinking he had landed in Asia, Columbus planted the Spanish flag and then sailed on. He landed on Cuba on the 28th October, which he thought was Japan.

After a stormy passage home, Columbus arrived to report his discovery of a westward passage to Asia. Columbus undertook three more voyages, but never realised he had discovered a whole new continent!

Map 4: The Indies

With Bartholomew Dias' rounding the Cape, and then with Columbus' apparent discovery of a more direct way to the East and its wealth, the rivalry between Portugal and Spain heated up. In 1494 they agreed to divide the world between them in the treaty of Tordesillas.

The Treaty drew a line on the map of the globe 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. The lands discovered to the east of that line would be Portugal's; those to the west would be Spain's.

Da Gama's voyage

The Portuguese stepped up their efforts by sending Vasco da Gama on the first European voyage to India.

Vasco da Gama (1460-1524) was ordered to sail for India and stake Portugal's claim to that land. He set sail with a fleet of four vessels – two carracks, one caravel and a storeship – on the 15th July, 1497. After stopping at the Azores (26th July), the Cape of Good Hope (November 7th), and various points along the southern and eastern African coast, da Gama's fleet reached Calicut, on the Indian coast, on May 20th 1498.

Da Gama failed to make a trade treaty with the ruler of Calicut – the trinkets he had brought were of no interest in India; moreover, the Muslim merchants who had dominated the Indian Ocean maritime trade for centuries were naturally hostile to these newcomers.

Map 5: Voyages

With the turn of the century, voyages of discovery multiplied. Navigators in the service of Spain probed the American coasts, only gradually realising that they had discovered an entirely new continent. Meanwhile the Portuguese consolidated their hold on the trade routes to the East with their first fortified bases in the Indian Ocean.

Amerigo Vespucci (1454-1512) was, like Columbus, an Italian navigator in the service of Spain. In 1499 and 1501 he made two voyages which charted the coasts of South America and the Caribbean. These voyages convinced Vespucci that this coastline was not Asia, but a new continent. Shortly after his return, a German map-maker drew a map of South America, calling it "Amerigo's land" – and the name "America" stuck.

Goa, India

After Vasco da Gama's expedition had visited India in 1498, subsequent voyages had proved that there was real wealth to be made in the trade with the region. Naturally this led to war with the Indian rulers, to atrocities on both sides, and, under the leadership of Afonso Albuquerque, to the establishment of an armed Portuguese base at Goa in 1510. From here Portuguese commercial and diplomatic contacts spread outward into the neighbouring Indian states.

Map 6: The East Indies

The establishment of a fortified trading base on the Indian coast, at Goa, had no sooner been achieved than the Portuguese were heading further east, to capture the Spice trade at its source, in the Spice Islands themselves. In this they failed, but in the process they laid the foundations for a far-flung system of trading bases throughout the eastern seas.

Molucca

The Moluccas are a major source of spices; indeed, these ARE the fabled Spice Islands.

Map 7: Magellan

The rivalry between Spain and Portugal to get at the Spice Islands led to the first circumnavigation of the globe, barely twenty years after the first rounding of the Cape of Good Hope. The expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese in the service of Spain, was an amazing – and tragic - achievement, a fitting end to the first dramatic phase of the European Age of Expansion.

Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) was a Portuguese nobleman who gained experience in the East as a soldier under Alburquerque. After Magellan's return home (1517), he fell out with the king of Portugal, and offered his services to the king of Spain.

By this date it was widely (but by no means universally) recognized that the lands found across the Atlantic were a new continent, and not Asia. This had come as a disappointment to the Spanish, who had hoped that the fabled riches of Asia were in their hands.

The Spanish had not given up hope that the Spice Islands might still be reached directly, however, although at a longer distance than previously thought. The king of Spain therefore commissioned Magellan to find a westerly route to the Spice Islands for Spain. Magellan set sail with five ships on September 20th, 1519.

On October 21st the three remaining ships of the expedition entered what would later be called the Straits of Magellan and entering the Pacific on November 8th.

The crossing of the Pacific was a gruelling passage of 99 days, in which many of the crew died of hunger. Finally, on February 19th 1521, the ships reached Guam.

They left Guam on March 9th, sailing for the Philippines, which they reached on the 16th March. By this time the expedition had only 150 crew left – and soon they were to suffer another loss. Having made alliances with some local rulers, and converted one to Christianity; Magellan got involved in some hostilities between them, in which he was killed on April 27, 1521.

Finally, on September 6th, 1522, one ship and eighteen crew arrived home in Spain. 232 sailors had been lost on voyage, including their commander.

The voyage was the first to circumnavigate the world. On the way it had proved that the Pacific was not just a few days' sailing journey across, but a giant ocean, far larger even than the Atlantic. Magellan's route was too long and hazardous for commercial purposes.