

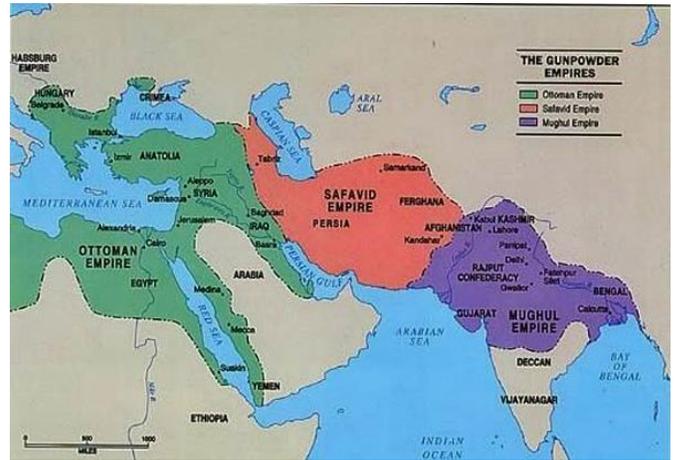
# ***The Ottoman Empire Encourages European Exploration***

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Beginning in the 1400s, a new power arose in Anatolia and the Middle East. When the Ottoman Empire took control of the western end of the ancient Silk Road, its policies and rivalries disrupted the flow of Asian luxury goods into Europe. As a result, Europeans sought alternative routes to the riches of the Orient.

The fortunes of the Silk Road had waxed and waned for more than 1,000 years prior to the Ottoman Empire's founding. In recent times, trade had flourished under the unifying rule of the Mongol Empire, which produced the Pax Mongolica. Traders and travelers such as the Venetian adventurer Marco Polo (1254-1324) took advantage of the security provided by the Mongols to bring reports of Asian wonders back to Europe. However, Asian luxury goods were expensive, and their use was limited to the wealthiest of the elites.



The Mongol Empire crumbled by 1368 and the Black Death swept through Asia and Europe, disrupting trade along the Silk Road. However, Crusaders returning to Europe from the Holy Land had brought back wonderful goods that were manufactured in the Middle East, or that had traveled there via the Indian Ocean trade routes, a maritime alternative to the overland Silk Road through Central Asia. Crusader knights and foot-soldiers exposed people from less prestigious European families to fabulous Asian technology and manufactured goods, as well as the flavors of Asian spices. Desire for these luxuries grew in Europe, just as access to them decreased.

The Ottoman Empire had been founded back in 1299, but it did not reach its height of territorial expansion and political power until the 1450s after the Turks seized control of Constantinople, a powerful trading city in the Byzantine Empire. Control of Constantinople, renamed Istanbul, gave the Turks control of all trade between Asia and Europe along the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Unfortunately for the Europeans, the Ottomans established diplomatic relations with some European countries, including France, but had strong rivalries with other powers such as the Hapsburg dynasty that ruled the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Spain. The Turks were able to limit trade in Asian goods to their rivals.

Perhaps more importantly, however, a second rising power in neighboring Iran was the Safavid Empire, another of Asia's "gunpowder empires." Of course, the Silk Road had to pass through Persia before it arrived in Turkey. The Safavids and the Ottomans were frequently at war with one another over bordering territories, and this rivalry more than any other factor choked off trade along the Silk Road.

Europe, thus, was essentially cut off from the overland Silk Road, and had to pay exorbitant prices for Asian goods that traveled on the Indian Ocean trade routes, passing through the hands of Indian, Arab, Ottoman, and Venetian traders before arriving in Europe. Demand was high, and prices were sky-high. It only made sense to try to sail directly to Asia and buy the goods there.

This tactic was possible by the late 1400s, because Europe had acquired necessary sailing technologies from Asia such as the magnetic compass from China, the astrolabe from Ottoman Egypt, and the Arabs' lateen sail for sailing into the wind. Thus, motivated in large part by Ottoman disputes and policies, the Europeans decided to set out and find Asia. The famous voyages of Bartolomeu Dias, Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus, and others might never have come about, if the Ottomans had not taken power in Turkey. Completely by accident, Ottoman Turkey inspired European exploration of the globe, and changed the world forever.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Review Questions:**

1. What was the Pax Mongolica? How did it benefit Asia and Europe?
2. What event increased the desire for goods from Asia?
3. What was significant about the fall of Constantinople?
4. Why did the Ottoman Empire cut off trade to some European nations?
5. How did the rise of the Safavid Empire in Iran disrupt trade along the Silk Road?
6. Why didn't Europeans want to use Indian Ocean trade routes?
7. In a detailed paragraph, explain how the Ottoman Empire led to the discovery of the New World by European explorers.