ECO 221OY

Topic no. 29: European Overseas Explorations and Colonizations: the Portuguese and Spanish Empires, c. 1420 - 1600

General Readings:


   a) John H. Munro, ‘Patterns of Trade, Money, and Credit,’ pp. 147-96.
   c) Wolfgang Reinhard, ‘The Seaborne Empires,’ pp. 637-64

Shipping and Navigation:


Portugal and Spain, Africa, Asia, and the New World, 1400 - 1620


**QUESTIONS:**

1. What particular factors -- economic, social, cultural, political/military -- led or inspired Western Europeans, and especially Iberians, to engage in overseas explorations, discoveries, and then colonizations from the early fifteenth century? How important were relations and conflicts with the Islamic (Muslim) world in Iberia and North Africa in the processes of overseas Iberian expansion? What role did the Iberian Reconquista play in these processes in particular?

2. What advances in shipbuilding, maritime navigation, and cartography made possible and promoted the new age of Overseas Expansion, from the early fifteenth century? What was the Atlantic ship?

3. Why in particular was the small, economically underdeveloped (or ‘backward’) nation of Portugal the first, as a nation, to engage in overseas exploration, expansion, and colonization? Explain the events that led the Portuguese to discover a sea route to explore, trade with, and colonize parts of West Africa in the 15th century? Explain the importance of the following in Portuguese explorations, trade, and colonization: gold, spices, sugar, and slaves.

4. How did the Portuguese establish their Empire in the Indian Ocean, and how did they seek to gain control over the Asian spice trades? Why did they fail in this attempt, and how did they come to lose their Indian Ocean Empire: in particular to the Dutch and the English?

5. How did the Americas come to be divided between Spain and Portugal -- and in particular why did the Portuguese colonize Brazil? What was the importance of Brazil for the west European economy?
6. Discuss the importance of sugar in the economic development of the Atlantic and Caribbean islands and of Brazil during the 16th and 17th centuries. What was the importance of sugar in Spanish, Portuguese, and European commerce during the 16th and 17th centuries?