

The Spice Islands:

Early Globalization and the Search for Great Flavor

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The Moluccas

- Also known as the Maluku Islands
- Located in Indonesia along the equator
- Composed of hundreds of islands, but only a few were important to the spice trade
 - Ternate, Tidore, Moti, Makian, and Bacan
- Volcanic islands with extremely fertile soil, covered with rain-forests
- Only source of cloves, nutmeg and mace until the 1700's



The Spice Trade

- Spices such as cloves, nutmeg and mace were introduced to Europe by the Arabs
- Arabs controlled most of the overland trade routes and kept the source of their products secret
- Europeans began searching for sea routes to obtain the products they desired after the Crusades threatened trade with the Arabs
- The Portuguese found the Moluccas and discovered the source of the spices



Treaty of Saragossa (1529)

- Magellan's explorations caused conflict between Spain and Portugal because the Treaty of Tordesillas did not define who controlled territories in the Pacific
- The Moluccas were a primary cause of contention
- Portugal paid Spain for the Moluccas and the Treaty of Saragossa extended the line of demarcation between Portuguese and Spanish territories around globe



Cloves

- Flower buds of an evergreen tree
- Found in Indonesia and India
- Cloves contain a powerful food preservative
- Clove oil is both an antiseptic and an anesthetic



Early Maps

- **1521:** Pigafetta, Antonio, ca. 1480/91–ca. 1534. “Figure of the Five Islands Where Grow the Cloves, and of Their Tree.” From volume 2 of *Magellan’s Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*. Translated and edited by R. A. Skelton (New Haven, Conn., 1969). Shown with the permission of the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. [Rare Books Division]



On that day of Sunday I went ashore to see how the cloves grow. The tree is tall and as thick as a man. Its branches in the center spread out widely, but at the top they grow into a kind of peak. The leaf is like that of a laurel, and the bark of the color of brown tan. The cloves come at the tip of branches, ten or twenty together. These trees almost always bear more of them on one side than on the other, according to the season. When the cloves sprout, they are white; when ripe, red; and when dried, black. They gather them twice a year, at Christmas and again on the feast of St John the Baptist, because at these two seasons the air is most temperate, but more so at Christmas. And when the year is hotter, and there is less rain, they gather three or four hundred bahar* of cloves in each of those islands, and they grow only in the mountains. . . . Nowhere in the world do good cloves grow except on five mountains of those five islands. . . . We saw almost every day a cloud descend and encircle first one of those mountains and then the other, whereby the cloves become more perfect. (1:120–21)



Dutch East Indies

- Dutch East India Company formed in 1602 and became the wealthiest trading company of the time
- During the 17th century, the Dutch destroyed clove trees in order to control the trade
- At this time, cloves were “worth more than their weight in gold”
- Cloves were considered an important part of island culture, so the destruction caused problems with the native population



Nutmeg

- The island of Run was the center of the nutmeg trade
- Was once the most valuable land on earth
- The Dutch and the English fought for control of the island
- England gave control of Run to the Dutch in exchange for control of Manhattan
- After gaining control of the island, the Dutch East Indian Company decimated the island's population, destroyed thousands of trees, created plantations and instituted strict penalties for growing without permission



Nutmeg seeds covered with Mace





Nutmeg crop in a village on Ambon





Mace drying on rooftop





Effects of the Spice Trade

- New spices influenced cuisines world-wide
- Enormous creation of wealth during the height of the spice trade
- Diffusion of European languages, religions and cultural practices to Indonesia
- Destruction of local populations and their culture
- Destruction of natural habitat – replaced with plantation agriculture

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 - Elizabeth Blackwell, “The Clove, *Carophyllus aromaticus*.” Plate 338 from volume 2 of Blackwell’s *A Curious Herbal, Containing Five Hundred Cuts, of the Most Useful Plants, Which Are Now Used in the Practice of Physic: . . . To Which Is Added a Short Description of Ye Plants; and Their Common Uses in Physic* (London, 1739). [Rare Books Division] photo and information from: http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/maps/websites/pacific/spice-islands/cloves.html
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