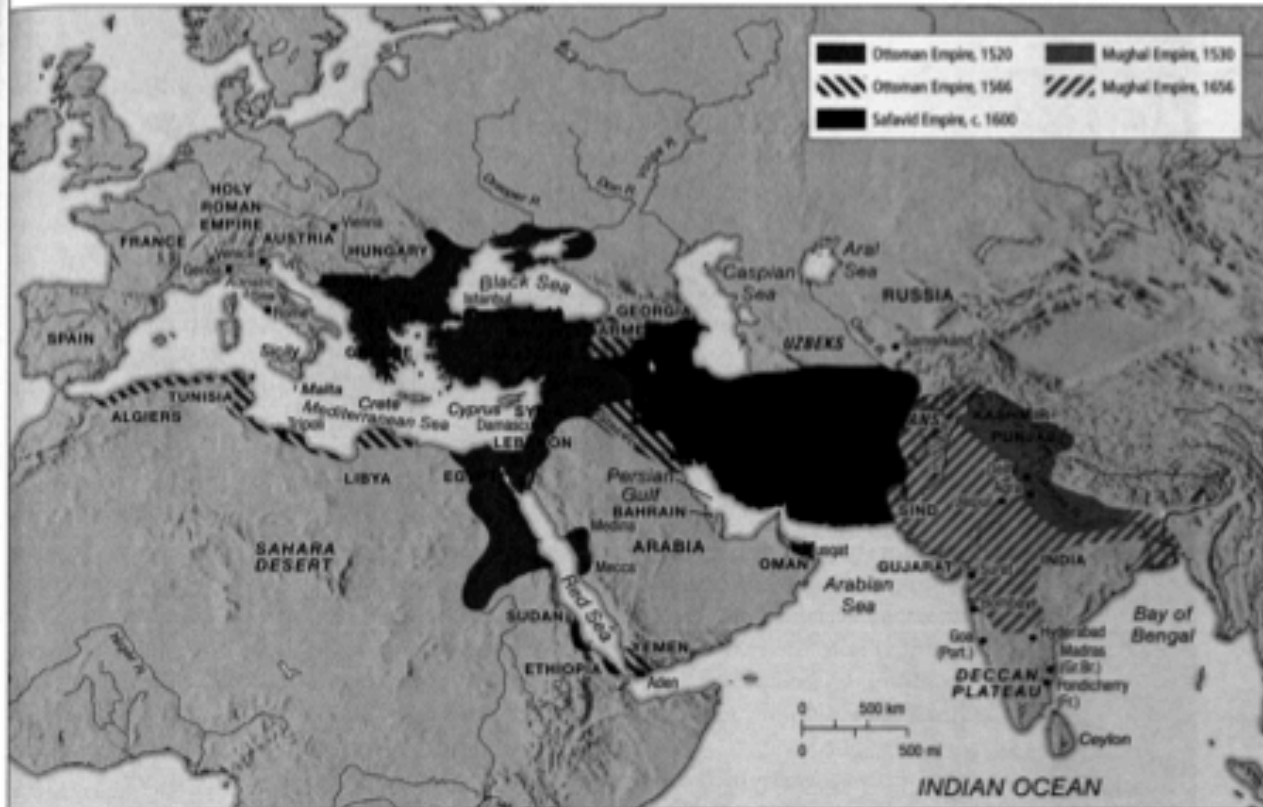


FOUNDATION MAP 22.1

Islamic Asian Empires in 1600

As the 17th century began, Islam's position in the world seemed unshakable. Notice that the great Islamic empires consolidated in the 16th century spread across southern Asia, southeastern Europe, and northeastern Africa. Using the Indian Ocean as a commercial highway, Muslims dominated oceangoing trade in the Eastern Hemisphere. The Arabic language, colored and enriched by Persian, united the Muslim faithful in a spiritual and cultural community spanning thousands of miles. What advantages and disadvantages can you identify for these empires?



The Indian Ocean Trade

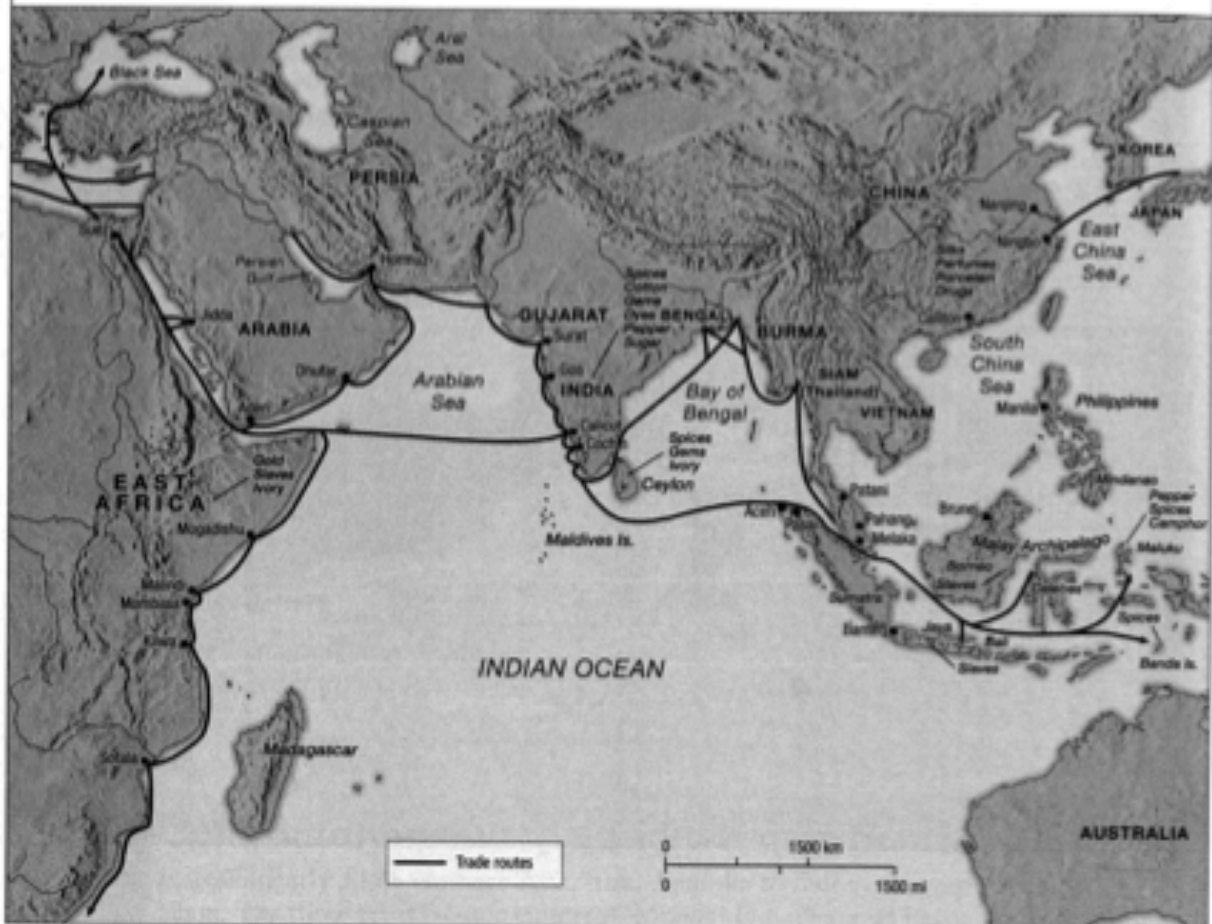
During the 16th century, and in the centuries immediately preceding it, the Indian Ocean basin served as the world's main center of maritime trade. Riding seasonal monsoon winds, which generally blow to the south and west from November to March, and to the north and east from April to September, Arab and Persian sailors carried on a lively commerce connecting India, Persia, Arabia, the city-states of East Africa, and Europe. Farther east, Chinese and Southeast Asian ships carried merchandise back and forth from India to Southeast Asia and the East Indies, and through the Straits of Melaka to the South China Sea and southern China.

Indian Ocean commerce was highly specialized, with each region typically supplying products that were locally raised, manufactured, or mined (Map 22.2). East Africa supplied ebony, ivory, slaves, and especially gold, mined in southeastern Africa and shipped from the great port of Kilwa. Arabia and Persia provided horses, figs, dates, and incense, as well as fine woven tapestries and carpets. India was known for its superb cotton textiles as well as for various dyes (including indigo), leather goods, carpets, knives, and assorted spices, including especially cinnamon and pepper. Southeast Asia and the East Indies produced rubies, gold, tin, sandalwood, and spices such as cinnamon and ginger.

The Indian Ocean connects world trade networks

MAP 22.2 Trade Routes Across the Indian Ocean, 1600

Hindu, Muslim, and Chinese traders crisscrossed the Indian Ocean using trade routes that had been established for centuries. Their familiarity with and systematic exploitation of these routes guaranteed their wealth and power. Note that the Indian Ocean's central position linked the Pacific Ocean with the Mediterranean/Red Sea trade. Why did the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th century challenge this established network?



The Maluku islands in the eastern East Indies were famous for their nutmeg and cloves; Westerners called them the Spice Islands. And Chinese products, such as porcelains and silks, were valued throughout the Indian Ocean basin and in Europe.

To handle all this trade, thriving seaports grew up along Asia's southern coast. These commercial centers included Aden at the mouth of the Red Sea, Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf, and Calicut on India's southwestern seaboard, known as the **Malabar Coast**.

Farther east, Melaka, on the straits connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea, served as the region's greatest commercial center. Although Muslim merchants and mariners conducted much of the commerce, many of these cities were religiously and culturally diverse, with Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and others engaging in crafts and commerce.

The empires of southern Asia derived substantial benefits from the Indian Ocean trade. It added immensely to the wealth of their realms and helped fill the treasuries of their rulers, who charged a variety of licensing fees, taxes, and customs duties on artisans,

Islamic empires rely on Indian Ocean trade

merchants, and shippers. To a certain extent, then, the wealth and power of the Muslim world derived from Islamic domination of the Indian Ocean trade.

Ironically, one of Islam's greatest triumphs—the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks—set in motion events that eventually undermined this domination and the fortunes of Islamic southern Asia. For in the late 15th century, Portuguese sailors had initiated the European voyages of discovery (Chapter 19) and challenged Muslim control of the Indian Ocean.