Sites of Encounter
Lesson #6: Calicut

What were the effects of the exchanges at Calicut?

Major Topics:
- Spices and trade goods
- Trade patterns in the Indian Ocean
- Cultural Encounters at Calicut
- Spread of cultural & religious influences in South and Southeast Asia

Calicut was a major trade city for the Indian Ocean trade and one of the many sites of encounter in South and Southeast Asia. Traders used the monsoon winds to exchange spices from the Southeast Asian islands with Chinese and Indian products and goods from the west. Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim cultural and religious influences spread along with this trade. Those influences spread inland from sites of encounter such as Calicut. In the competitive and profitable spice trade, which was not dominated by a single political power, merchants from many different cultures coexisted, following shared norms that maximized profit and minimized conflict. However, this was a fragile coexistence that was easily upset by violation of those norms.

Students will examine a variety of primary and secondary texts and images to identify key steps in the development of Calicut as a trade city. They will then analyze primary sources on Calicut and the Indian Ocean trade from different perspectives to recognize how different travelers’ perspectives were shaped by their motives and experiences. At the same time students will recognize that the common goal of acquiring spices brought together traders from different places, with both positive and negative consequences.
Procedures

Step 1: What’s So Hot about Spices?
Spices were highly valued in all the cultures of the medieval world. Spices were used for three purposes – as a flavor for bland food, as a medicine, and as a perfume or fragrance in religious rituals. Rich people consumed expensive spices to show off their wealth. SE6.1 What’s So Hot About Spices? introduces students to medieval recipes and other uses of spices and shows them a map of the original spice islands. Have students complete the worksheet in groups and follow with a class discussion emphasizing the huge attraction the spice trade had throughout Afro-Eurasia.

Step 2: Monsoon Winds and Travel in the Indian Ocean
SE6.2 Indian Ocean Trade Map orients students to the connections between the flow of the monsoon winds and the organization of Indian Ocean trade. Explain to students that the monsoon winds determined the times and directions of travel. Once a merchant arrived in a port, he had to wait there until the monsoon changed. Since this could take six months or more, sailors and merchants often had second homes in distant places. They intermarried with local people and set up permanent communities. Have students do the map activity using SE6.3 Monsoon Winds and Indian Ocean Trade Routes and the Afro-Eurasian Trade Circles map in groups. Answers may be from the group discussion or done individually. Finally, ask students to share, in their groups, a prediction about the effects of cultures coming together in Calicut. Point out that Calicut is in the center, and goods were passing through from both east and west.

Show students the visuals in SE6.4 Dhows, Junks and Bugis Ships and have them identify the lateen sails (explained in lesson 5), the bamboo-reinforced junk sails (explained in mini-lesson 2B), and other features of ship design. Introduce the bugis ship (the modern version and the Borobudur relief carving) used by Southeast Asian islanders to transport food and raw materials among the islands.

Step 3: The Organization of Indian Ocean Trade
Tell students they will learn about how traders in Calicut had different motives and, as a result, different experiences and effects on the region. Have students read SE6.5 Calicut and the Indian Ocean Trade, a secondary summary on the organization of Indian Ocean trade. Students will independently read and mark the text, underlining words that are unfamiliar and highlighting important points. Then have students discuss the text in groups.

Step 4: The Spread of Culture and Religion
This step has students analyze art and architecture from India and Southeast Asia in order to recognize the effects of cross-cultural transmission in Southeast Asia. The activity in SE6.6 Comparing Temples and Sculptures in India and Southeast Asia emphasizes that rulers displayed their power through temples and that
the architectural similarities among the temples are evidence of a shared culture of rulership in the region. Religious sculptures were another medium of religious influence and could be carried by merchants. Similarities in style and bronze-casting techniques demonstrate cross-cultural transmission.

Step 5: Analyzing Perspectives on Calicut and Trade

Students read the primary sources in the series SE6.8 Primary Sources on Calicut and Trade and complete SE6.7 Source Analysis Chart, which has them source the documents, identify the point of view, and record evidence. The sources come from Jewish merchants, Arab geographers, Chinese officials, and Portuguese explorers. The activity has them collect evidence on cultural understanding, gaining riches and leading to war. Depending on class make up and teacher preference, this may be done as a gallery walk with sources on the walls of the classroom, or students sitting in groups with sources grouped into packets by region.

Step 6: Writing Assignment

Using the evidence that they have recorded on the source analysis chart, students will write an essay responding to the lesson focus question: What were the effects of the exchanges at Calicut? SE6.9 Calicut Writing Assignment also includes a more specific follow-up question: How did the spice trade bring cultures together, make some people rich, and lead to war? This corresponds to the categories on the source analysis chart.

Modifications / Support for Student Literacy

- Each group will investigate only one area (Chinese or Portuguese, for example) and then report out to the class. The students get the information on areas they did not focus on from other groups as they share out.
- There are multiple sources for each group so number of items to be analyzed in for each trade region may be reduced to allow for a more focused analysis and discussion. This may be done in groups or as a whole class activity with the teacher leading with an example for the first source and gradually releasing responsibility to the groups.
- Depending on the strengths and areas of improvement for any particular class, some of the chart could be filled out in advance, so that students will focus more on evidence and choosing appropriate excerpts.
- The writing piece could be a detailed paragraph or a full essay. (The prompt was written to accommodate both versions).
SE6.5: Calicut and the Indian Ocean Trade (page 1 of 3)

Since all ships were powered by wind, the monsoon seasons determined where and when people could travel around the Indian Ocean. Since Calicut was in the southern part of India and not far from Southwest and East Asia, it was a natural site for a trade city. Around Calicut on the Malabar Coast of southern India, farmers grew black pepper and weavers made cotton cloth. Our word for a kind of cotton cloth, “calico,” comes from the name of the city of Calicut.

Calicut was a small state on the Malabar coast, ruled by a king called the “Zamorin.” During the 13th-15th centuries India and Southeast Asia had a few large states, many small states, and some city-states, such as Calicut. This political diversity encouraged trade since small communities could not produce everything they needed. The rulers of Calicut took advantage of their location by making laws that were favorable to merchants. The Calicut government protected merchants from theft, taxed them at low rates, and treated all groups equally. As a result, many foreign merchants settled in the city and established communities.

In Calicut merchants from the Mediterranean and western Asia exchanged their goods from the Mediterranean and western Asia for products from China and Southeast Asia. Most desired were spices (such as black pepper, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and mace) from the Spice Islands and southern India. These sold for high prices, especially in Europe. As well as being used to flavor foods, many spices were also used as medicine and fragrances. Merchants also bought and sold cotton cloth from India; silk and porcelain from China; metals, armor, weapons, and perfume from Egypt and Persia; horses and glassware from the Mediterranean; and slaves from the Mongol lands and East Africa.

Along with goods, ideas also travelled. For a thousand years, travelers carried the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism and Indian culture to the east and southeast. Chinese culture spread south and west. The rulers of Southeast Asian kingdoms, such as Angkor, Champa, and Srivijaya, looked to India and China as powerful cultures that could give them power and prestige. Later, Persian and Arabian culture and the religion of Islam spread east across the islands.
SE6.5: Calicut and the Indian Ocean Trade (page 2 of 3)

Merchants in Calicut

Arabs and Persians from the Muslim world had been go-betweens for Asian and European goods for centuries. They realized the mutual benefit of cultural exchange and respect. The biggest merchants were the “Karimi Merchants,” based in Cairo, who had a system of sharing the risks of trade. Chinese merchants were also very established in Calicut, other Indian trade cities, and trade cities in Southeast Asia. Likewise the Chinese had long had trade experience with the Indian subcontinent. As other groups, especially the Europeans, attempted to do business with India directly, they were met with resistance from the established traders.

Competition wasn’t the only thing holding traders back. The exact location of the spices was a closely guarded secret. Bad sailing weather and pirate attacks were also possibilities that made trade dangerous. Despite these risks, many different groups saw rewards in their encounters with Calicut.

Not everyone, however, was equally deferential. When the Portuguese set out to find a route around Africa to the famous Spice Islands, they did not know much about the Indian Ocean trade. The Portuguese brought what they thought others would like in trade, but were in for a surprise when they encountered Muslims (whom they described using the term “Moor”) in Calicut. Religious differences fueled the rivalry between the two groups. The Muslims tried to turn the Zamorin of Calicut against the Portuguese. Indians quickly found out the European trade goods were of low quality. The Portuguese went home with knowledge of Calicut’s location, but only a few spices. (They made a 3000% profit, but had expected more).

What could the Portuguese do? They suddenly realized that they were viewed as not having merchandise worth trading. They would not be invited in to trade for the spices they so desperately wanted. Western Europe had a history of deciding trading rights by force, and violence was an area in which they excelled. The future would bring attacks in and around India, revenge, serious damage to Calicut, and domination by the Portuguese who were most willing to use force.
Questions for Consideration

- What were some of the difficulties faced by merchants who traveled for trade goods?
- How did competition for trade and religious differences complicate relations between the Portuguese and Muslims in Calicut?
- Why were the Portuguese discouraged from trading in Calicut?
- What, if anything, could Calicut have done to prevent attacks that led to its conquest?
### SE6.6: Source Analysis Chart

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source #</th>
<th>Point of View</th>
<th>What is the source telling me? (CU-Cultural Understanding, R-Gaining Riches, W-Leading to War)</th>
<th>Excerpts (key quotes from sources)</th>
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SE6.6.7 Ma-huan’s Description of Calicut and its People

**Background:** Ma-huan was a translator for the Chinese Admiral Zheng He. He traveled with the famous Chinese fleet on three voyages and wrote an account of his travels. In the second paragraph, he described how government officials, called overseers and brokers, inspected and set the prices for goods coming into Calicut.

The wealthy people mostly cultivate coconut trees. The coconut has ten different uses. The young tree has syrup, [that is] very sweet and good to drink. It can be made into wine by fermentation. For vegetables they have mustard plants, green ginger, turnips, caraway seeds, onions, garlic, egg plants, cucumbers, and melons. They have both red and white rice, but barley and wheat are both absent. Their wheat and flour all comes from other places as merchandise for sale here.

When a ship arrives from China, the king’s overseer goes on board and makes an invoice of the goods, and a day is settled for valuing the cargo. On the day appointed, the silk goods are first inspected and valued. Afterwards, the broker states "The price of your goods is now fixed, and cannot in any way be altered." The price of pearls, precious stones, and the Chinese goods exchanged for them is fixed by the broker. They have no abacus on which to make their calculations, but in its place they use their toes and fingers, and, what is very wonderful, they are never wrong in their reckonings.


**Questions for Consideration**

- What is Ma-huan’s attitude toward the people in Calicut? Describe the evidence which supports your answer.
- What does this source tell the reader about the organization of Calicut as a trading center? Give evidence to support your answer.
Background: Vasco da Gama set sail on July 8, 1497, rounded the Cape of Good Hope four months later, and reached Calicut on May 20, 1498. He was not prepared for what he found or the riches that were expected of him and so, was unable to trade most of his goods. The few spices he managed to buy still sold for a 3000% profit (No, that’s not a typo.) and Portugal saw this as an opportunity which was too good to pass up. The Portuguese would return with more soldiers. In this passage, the author called the Muslim traders “Moors”, which was a Portuguese and Spanish name for Iberian Muslims.

1498. Calicut. The first greeting that he [Vasco da Gama] received was in these words: "May the Devil take thee! What brought you hither?" They [Muslim traders in Calicut] asked what he sought so far away from home, and [Da Gama] told them that we came in search of Christians and of spices. They said: "Why does not the King of Castile, the King of France, or the Signoria of Venice send thither [send ships here]?" He [Da Gama] said that the King of Portugal would not consent to their doing so, and they [the traders] said [the Portuguese king] did the right thing. After this conversation they took him [Da Gama] to their lodgings and gave him wheaten bread and honey.

When he [Da Gama] had eaten he returned to the ships, accompanied by one of the Moors, who was no sooner on board, than he said these words: "A lucky venture, a lucky venture! Plenty of rubies, plenty of emeralds! You owe great thanks to God, for having brought you to a country holding such riches!"

We were greatly astonished to hear his talk, for we never expected to hear our language spoken so far away from Portugal.

The city of Calicut is inhabited by Christians. [The first voyagers to India mistook the Hindus for Christians.] They are of tawny complexion. Some of them have big beards and long hair, while others clip their hair short or shave the head, merely allowing a tuft to remain on the crown as a sign that they are Christians. They also wear moustaches. They pierce their ears and wear much gold in them. They go naked down to the waist, covering their lower extremities with very fine cotton cloth. But it is only the most respectable who do this, for the others manage as best they are able.
On Tuesday, May 29, the captain-major [Da Gama] got ready the following things to be sent to the king [the Zamorin of Calicut], that is, twelve pieces of lammel, four scarlet hoods, six hats, four strings of coral, a case containing six basins for washing hands, a case of sugar, two casks of oil, and two of honey. And as it is the custom not to send anything to the king without the knowledge of the Moor, his factor, and of the bale [Calicut government officials], the captain-major informed them [the factor and the bale] of his intention. They came, and when they saw the present they laughed at it, saying that it was not a thing to offer to a king, that the poorest merchant from Mecca, or any other part of India, gave more, and that if he wanted to make a present it should be in gold, as the king would not accept such things. When the captain-major heard this he grew sad...

SE6.9 Calicut Writing Assignment

I am ready for this assignment if I have...

- Reviewed SE6.1 and SE6.3 and completed the Indian Ocean Trade Map (SE6.2)
- Completed a careful reading and discussion of the background document (SE6.5)
- Read and discussed the primary and secondary source documents (SE6.8)
- Charted my answers to the primary and secondary source documents on the Source Analysis Chart (SE6.7)

Getting ready to write:

1. Look carefully at the directions and the writing prompt. Disassemble the question by breaking it down into parts. What is it actually asking you to do?
2. Review your map and reread the background document. What parts of the writing prompt are addressed here? Make notes if necessary.
3. Look at your Source Analysis Chart. If it is completely filled out, you have many elements of a rough draft ready to go. Did you notice that circling UC, R or W leads you to the categories in the prompt?

Directions: Use your map and source analysis page to respond to the following prompt. Remember, you will start with a claim which responds to the prompt and follow it up with evidence from your notes. The more specific your evidence, the better your writing will be.

Prompt: What were the effects of the exchanges at Calicut? How did the spice trade bring cultures together, make some people rich, and lead to war?